John W. Leach $12.

WHO GOES THERE ?

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Being an account of the Secret Service
Adventures of "Ex-Intelligence"
during the Great War of
1914-1918

Put down here
by

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TO MY SON

GEOFFREY

My thanks to R. D. Hemingway for trimming
the sheets Liverpool fashion.

War, after all, 's but a flash in the pan :
It's the battles of peace that make the man.

—H. de H.

"He tells me the British Intelligence Service is marvellously good. They have reports of everything going on in Berlin, and oftentimes they get copies of letters and documents of great value."

COLONEL EDWARD HOUSE.

CONCERNING THE ESSENTIAL PROFESSOR

In narrating some of my experiences as a Secret Service Agent, I am well aware that I lay myself open to many, and conflicting, charges—or, if you prefer, criticisms. That I cannot avoid. Espionage is a queer job.

But I can disabuse your mind of one thing. If in the cold light of print this recital of mine savours of the theatre; if there is to be found in it comedy or tragedy, melodrama or even farce—so, believe me, it was in the acting. But with this difference: the spy in enemy country in war-time acts not for public applause; not in fear of "the bird"; but in the ever present apprehension that if his acting is not true to life in the minutest detail, for him the curtain will fall inevitably and finally to the rough music of a firing squad; as it did to that brave German Secret Service man, Karl Lody, within the precincts of the Tower of London.

I often wonder if any member of our theatrical profession took up Espionage during the War, and, if so, what he made of it. I never met nor heard of one. The most successful Secret Service Agent I

ever knew was, in days before the War, a Professor. You must make of the term what you will; certainly you would admit its application if I were permitted to divulge his Academic honours and the number of foreign and British Universities with which he could claim connection. He makes no claim on the foreign ones now!

Why he took on Secret Service work I cannot imagine. I know he disliked it, not only because his temperament revolted against any sort of deception but because he was, on his own admission, physically a "funk." Like a few other intellectuals, the Professor was, I suspect, "urged" into the job; and whosoever did the urging was a sound judge of men, and one who realised that physical funk does not always connote cowardice. Besides, patriotism is a wonderful stiffener.

At all events, the Professor, once persuaded, quickly proved himself one of the "finds" of the War. I hardly expect to be believed, yet I have his own authority for saying that during the whole long period of his Secret Service activities—and, heaven knows! he trod on dynamite—never once was he "cornered"; never once, I venture to say, was he even suspected, although before, during, and after the War he persistently moved in, and into and out of, every enemy country except Turkey; mixed, too, in the highest circles of German and Austrian Society; as if he wore a talisman which enabled him to travel and

to conduct his affairs without let or hindrance, war notwithstanding.

What was this talisman ? Frankly, I do not know, unless it was an uncanny ability to speak foreign languages, even foreign dialects, like a native, and to act the part like a native. But then, each of us, his chosen colleagues, had to possess that sort of ability in a marked degree. Dare I whisper it—since the suspicion often occurred to me—did he obtain help from the other side ? Again I do not know. Even if it was so he must have had the devil's own luck.

But there ! I only introduced the Professor because he it was who arranged means of " subterranean " communication, essential " papers," safe harbourage—all the network of ways and means, in fact, whereby I myself and certain other Secret Service colleagues were enabled to carry on ; and because even now—so long after the War—I may not disclose his machinations for our assistance, recurring bare statements, or oblique references, will be found here and there in my narrative that must inevitably disappoint the reader.*

This Preface, then, in apology to my readers ; yes, and in gratitude to the Professor, whose counsel and prevision, under Heaven, so often saved me from exhibiting my own pet aversion—funk—in the presence of a firing squad.

* The reader must use his own discretion, in regard to names. Those of the major characters are fictitious ; and much of the " geography " is purposely inaccurate.

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Who Goes There?

CHAPTER I

WHEREIN I TELL HOW MY CAREER WAS NEARLY ENDED BEFORE IT HAD BEGUN

It was exactly 3.30 p.m. on the 29th of July, 1914, when I rang the front-door bell of the white-walled blue-roofed villa belonging to my old friend Stephen Townsend, on the outskirts of the quaint little town of A——, so charmingly situated on the left bank of the Rhine; and although I pressed the button firmly, I did so with no little inward trepidation. Indeed, I felt the falseness of my position so acutely—not for the first time—that I regretted ties of friendship held me to keep my promise to call upon Townsend before I left Rhineland for England. As it was, I had already put it off, and put it off, until the last possible opportunity, having planned to leave for London at eight o'clock the following morning.

Already my departure had been delayed too long. True, there hardly appeared a ripple on the pond of everyday German life; all seemed "as usual"; trains, for instance, ran to ordinary schedule; but

those " in the know " were well aware, among other things, that prying, listening police in plain clothes stole about everywhere ; the foreigner, on business or pleasure, was shadowed, his conversation often registered ; and in the cafés, among themselves, Teutons were unanimously agreed that war was a certainty—and imminent.

Stephen Townsend and I had been school chums in England in the long ago, and later we were at Bonn together, students in the same University Corps. Much to my regret, though not to my surprise (for he was German on his mother's side), after leaving Bonn my friend settled down in Germany for good, and, marrying the daughter of one of the Fatherland's ablest Generals, eventually Townsend became managing director of a big iron-foundry in busy Oberhausen.

Of course, he had long been a naturalised Deutscher ; and that was where the shoe was pinching me as I stood on his doorstep in the afternoon of July 29, 1914.

To all intents and purposes Townsend was German ; I had remained unshakenly English ; and, moreover, my presence in Germany at the time had been occasioned by serious, not to say compromising, business.

In a word, owing to my exceptional knowledge of the country and its people, a never-failing memory, and my native-like use of the German language, I had been despatched thither by a certain authority to ascertain at first hand whether the Germans were

making, or were about to make, a really big and earnest move in the direction of war.

Well, for my own part, I had gained conviction from facts. That very morning, after receiving Townsend's third successive note reminding me insistently of my promise to look him up, I had sent off from the Central Post Office, Coblenz, to an address in London a cablegram which, when decoded, gave in tabulated form particulars of eight German Corps actually awaiting the command to set forth to war from their respective headquarters.

Bold as brass I had filled up the form in the Telegraph Office at the corner of the Clemens Platz, paid the fee—and secretly wondered whether the message would reach its destination. I had my doubts. I knew that correspondence was already being tampered with, and that the Germans themselves left the flaps of envelopes unstuck to ease the "secret" work of their Post Office officials. Afterwards, when I got in touch with London from Rotterdam, I learnt that my cable had, in fact, been withheld; although my confirmatory letter, written in faultless German, and with the flap of the envelope left unfastened, had got into the right hands without any delay!

So much for that. My friend Townsend opened the door in person, and after shaking me effusively by both hands, affectionately kissed me on the cheek. Noticing that he limped, I enquired the cause, and was told casually that he had recently had a bad

motoring spill. As a matter of detail—though on the subject he was dumb—it was this accident alone which kept him now at home and in civilian garb, for Townsend had received his military call several days before. This, too, I learnt later.

Concerning the days of our old friendship, however, we found plenty to say to each other, and I was not at all sorry that his wife (who was delicate) and two children had gone out for an airing in his car, attended by their English governess and a woman servant at the wheel.

The fact that he should mention the woman chauffeur —women drivers being a rarity in Germany at the time—struck me oddly and even ominously ; but, as if to avoid comment, no sooner had he given me this piece of gratuitous information than Townsend, on the plea that the room in which we were sitting was unbearably stuffy, rose abruptly and led me out through the French windows into the garden at the back of the house. There we strolled across a lawn, which I remember had an ornamental fountain and great marble basin for carp in the centre ; and having wound our way through a shrubbery beyond, we presently came upon a shady summer-house, in which I was glad to perceive not only long cane chairs, but a table bearing cigars and cigarettes, tall glasses, and bottles whose misted exteriors betrayed recent acquaintance with the ice-chest. Townsend evidently was well served, for I had not been aware that he had

given an order. Indeed, I had seen no servant about the place.

At all events, thus admirably provided for, he and I talked on and on : of old German friends then scattered all over the globe ; of others who had left this world for better regions ; of a few who had won fame or wealth ; and of one or two who had desecrated the temple or had fallen by the way. But neither of us mentioned war, and although I was positive that Townsend knew as much, or almost as much, as I did about the serious position of affairs, he gave no sign in word or look, unless I except his curious mention of the fact that his chauffeur was a woman. But I did notice a trace of anxiety in his voice when he came to ask me the date of my return to London ; and when I answered that I intended to leave Germany the following morning (Wednesday), his relief was even more apparent. I noticed, too, that he did not invite me to stay for dinner that evening, as naturally one might have expected. And then—we had spoken in English all the time—he asked me, meaning what sort of work I was engaged upon in London, what was I " doing " ?

Of all questions, that was the one which I could not answer truthfully, and I was on the point of telling him that I had recently resigned a post in Bombay (which was true) and thought of going back there in a few months' time (which was untrue) when someone else dramatically answered his query for me.

The words, their furious delivery, and the sudden appearance of the person responsible for them were so unforeseen, so unexpected, that I shouldn't have been more astounded had the sun tumbled out of heaven to my feet.

" What is he doing ? " echoed a shrill voice in broken English ; " what is he doing ? He is spying for England, that is what he is doing. That man is an English spion ! " And there in the doorway of the summer-house, immediately in front of us, stood a woman. Tallish, dressed in white, a wrap of pink chiffon around her neck and shoulders, wearing a broad-brimmed Panama hat, her dark eyes blazing, her bosom heaving, dramatically she was stabbing the forefinger of her right hand at my face.

Obviously she had been eavesdropping. At a glance I saw that she was a neurasthenic, and divining that she was Townsend's wife, I rose to my feet, and bowing slightly, English fashion—said nothing.

Townsend had already risen, a look of annoyance about his eyes and mouth being quickly chased away by an indulgent smile.

" Lena, my dear," he said politely but reprovingly in English, " you are making a grave mistake. This gentleman is my old friend, Mr. ——, of whom you have often heard me speak. So far from his being an English spion, as you call him, I know him to be a lover of Germany. Why, we were at Bonn together," he added, as if the statement settled the question irrevocably.

" That makes no difference," cried the lady, who gave no sign of curbing her unnatural excitement. " He is an Englander, and Englanders only come to Germany to spy. They are all spies, every one."

" Lena, Lena ! " protested her husband, but the lady began again : " He is an English spion, I tell you ! " she screamed, so piercingly that I feared her words might reach dangerous ears.

" You English, how I hate you ! " She stamped her foot. " But you shall not escape, mister. You shall be shot for the spion you are. You shall not let him go, Stephen. Immediately I shall telephone for the police." Then she burst into tears, wheeled round, and dabbing agitatedly at her eyes with a handkerchief, she hurried away along the shrubbery path at a little mincing, swerving run. I half expected to see the poor creature trip up at every step she took.

Dementia had hit on the truth for once, at any rate, thought I ; and after one glance at Townsend's face I suggested tactfully that I'd better be going.

He wasn't slow to agree. " My wife," he explained, taking my arm as we left the summer-house, " may or may not telephone. Anyhow, it doesn't matter ; no, of course it doesn't matter." He paused, then added : " More probably she'll go and lie down on her bed the next half-hour or so. Dreadful fits of hysteria take hold of her without warning——" He broke off. " Your passport's all right ? "

I assured him that it was.

" Then you've nothing to worry about," he said. " But look here, old chap," he went on, lowering his voice, halting, and placing a hand on my shoulder, " look here ; as we've always been such pals—I know I shouldn't say it—but there's trouble coming very soon."

" You don't mean that war is likely ? " For the life of me I couldn't repress the direct question.

" I do," said Townsend, who, for his part, made no effort now to hide his emotion. " I think it's certain. Yesterday the military authorities in Berlin, acting on their own account—they've the power, you know—recalled officers and reservists ; there's a veiled mobilisation going on, and our Fleet's assembling at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. Gad ! it's too terrible to think of." He clenched his fists and shook them ; his lips were twitching.

" I suppose I shouldn't mind, were I wholly German," he proceeded, after a pause, as we moved on again. " Like the rest, I expect I should be transported into the seventh heaven. I can't make myself out. Here I am for what I am : half German, half English, married to a German wife ; I've two children ; all my worldly goods and interests lie in the Fatherland ; till yesterday I thought myself German in spirit, in almost everything, and now at the crucial moment you'll be surprised to learn that I've discovered I'm really English to the backbone." He looked at me interrogatively, and I saw that his eyes had moistened.

I felt horribly sorry for Townsend, and annoyed, too, with myself for being, unwittingly, the cause of a painful scene, with the probability that he would have to face another within doors.

Anxious as I was to escape a fresh outburst from the lady, if not worse happenings, I begged him to let me depart by the servants' entrance. He nodded without speaking, then led me to the edge of the lawn on our right, and under cover of leafy trees and shrubs we gained the side gate unobserved and without further incident.

" I shouldn't lose much time in getting away, old chap," said Townsend, as we gripped hands in farewell. " The Rhine scenery will keep. Come and see it, and me—if I'm spared—when the beastly business is all over, and my wife is herself again." *

At his last words I heard running footsteps on the gravel path at our rear. A maid-servant came scurrying along after us with a visiting-card held edgeways between her open thumb and forefinger. She handed it to her master, and cast, I thought, a rather suspicious glance at me.

" There are two men in the entrance hall waiting to see you, sir," she informed Townsend.

He glanced at the pasteboard and drew in a soft *pheew-oo !* " Tell them I will see them in one minute ;

* Poor Townsend !—a British bullet found him a day or two before the Christmas of that year.

and let them stay where they are," he instructed the girl, who immediately hastened away.

"They are two detectives," said Townsend hurriedly, opening the gate. "You'd better be getting, old chap—out of the district, too. I'll throw them off the scent, though you needn't fear these two; they're only locals. I'm awfully sorry. Of course, it wouldn't matter a tinker's button if things were normal. *Now* any foreigner is liable to arrest. You'd better not go back to the railway-station; head straight for the Dutch frontier. V——'s only twenty miles off. There you're safe, and there are heaps of trains to Flushing. You've only to take the first lane on your right, half a mile down this road"—he pointed southward—"and it's virtually a straight line. You'll come across a village about four miles down the lane. Maybe you can hire a motor there—of a sort. Goodbye, old chap—till our next meeting."

Knowing as well as my friend did the danger of delay, and naturally in no very comfortable frame of mind, I set off at a swinging five miles an hour, grateful for the temporary shade of the lime-trees which bordered each side of the dusty road. Happily I'd nothing to carry: my rucksack containing but an additional suit and some underclothing, which I had left at the railway-station, would have to take care of itself.

I reached the village shortly before six o'clock, and observing that the main street boasted a hairdresser's shop, that its door stood invitingly wide open, that

its two red plush chairs were unoccupied, and that the proprietor, an old fellow in white cap and apron, and a black cat with a white shirt-front were apparently occupied only with their own thoughts, I strode in; for it occurred (foolishly enough) to me that in case of official scrutiny or interrogation a tonsorial alteration might advantageously be made to render me less "English"; whereas a cold shampoo, if it didn't help to make me more German-looking, would certainly make me feel more English.

I got the old chap—he must have been close upon eighty—to cut my hair to the scalp with his clippers; I had a refreshing shampoo; and then, with the aid of hot curling-tongs, my moustache assumed an upward belligerent spike at each end that would have caused a fledgling Prussian lieutenant to swoon with envy.

The old *barbier* knew all about the coming great War, and as he was finishing me off I drew him out a little.

"Ach!" he exploded, after a fit of wheezing, such as an old grandfather clock indulges in before it condescends to strike, "Ach! I wish I were young again like you; yes, I should love to go bayonetting the French once more, as I did in '70. Yes, war is certain. A captain told me so this morning. He is going to Luxembourg to the others there to-morrow, yes. Russia is mobilising her troops; but what of that? The day after to-morrow [July 31st*] we shall

* That the actual date of Germany's declaration should have been known even to a village barber, is significant.

proclaim to be in a state of war." The old hairdresser paused, wheezed again for fully thirty seconds, and then went on: " And what a lovely picnic it will be for us over there—*ei!* We shall sweep through Belgium, grab Paris and all France's Channel ports in a month at the most. France will have a terrible sum to pay. The two hundred million of '70 will be only a beggar's dole. We shall grab all her colonies, too. Yes, it will be a beautiful war. Kolossal! Donnerwetter! If only I could be young again, and bayonet hundreds——"

Here the old man's memory became too much for him. Seizing a long-handled broom from a corner of his shop, the act sending the cat flying out into the street, he demonstrated how in '70 he had bayoneted three Zouaves whom he held at his mercy. " One pig-dog was here," he cried, " another there, and the other one there," accompanying his lunges with a series of bloodthirsty growls, which left the saliva dribbling down his wrinkled chin.

His performance ended, and after I'd allowed him time to finish his next fit of wheezing, I asked the animated old fossil if the village possessed a hireable conveyance of any sort.

He wagged his head. " To-day everything is in use," he replied, now puffing and blowing through his protruded lips and wiping his shiny chin with the back of his hand, " everything is in use except the hearse that is owned by the butcher."

As transit within a hearse is a mode of travel that all sensible people endeavour to put off until the last possible minute, and without making any comment on the odd combination of trades—although I once knew a Normandy innkeeper who was barber, bootmaker, clock-repairer, and undertaker all in one—I bade the old hairdresser adieu and continued my journey westward on Shanks' Mare. In front of me stretched a vast expanse of green and level meadowland, through which my road, running smooth and straight, tapered away in the distance to a mere point, and looked like a gigantic billiard-cue left lying idle along the middle of an immeasurable billiard-table.

Again I stepped it briskly, for I had an irksome presentiment that unless I could set my feet well across the other side of the River Maas within the next few hours at most, an internment camp or a fortress " for the duration " would be my fate. Whether or not the two detectives I'd left behind at Townsend's place had been summoned thither by Frau Townsend, the fact remained that their visit must have been inspired on my behalf. Besides, my orders were definite : " Report if you can, but do not on any account get caught in Germany by a declaration of war."

My eyesight had deceived me. Meeting hardly a soul upon the road, I'd done a good couple of English miles when in an unexpected dip, a wayside station, a mere rail " halt," irresistibly pulled me up. Guarded

by a sentry or two, the guns of a field-battery stood parked in the station yard, or, rather, on the waste land adjoining the railway lines. There was an air of somnolence about the little place ; something, too, in the attitude of the sentries which betokened the absence of commissioned officers. True, war was not yet an accomplished fact, but I will add that this was the only example of German military (rank and file) slackness ever witnessed by me before or since.

From my road a short cinder track led to the station past a solitary brown-washed cottage on my left, between which and the grey-painted guns on my right was erected a fowl-run, whose wire-netting fence, but flimsily supported, was about the last word in how *not* to do it.

While I surveyed the scene, wondering whether a risk were worth taking, the deity of espionage (is he mentioned in the classics, by the way ?) took a hand in the game. All at once, through the cottage door there bounded into the open half a bale of unwrapped wool endowed with canine life—an unwieldy mongrel pup. And the dogs of Germany are something to write home about, ranging as they do in all the colours of the rainbow, from (if you can imagine such a thing) a sort of long-haired cod-fish on stilts, to a sort of baby dromedary on nothing.

In the trail of the fearsome pup waddled, with all the speed at her command, a purple-faced, flat-footed lady of huge proportions and insecure outline, frenziedly

brandishing a besom. Howling, yelping, with his tail tucked tight under his ribs, and no doubt mistaking the wire netting for nothing more formidable than a rising evening mist, the terrified dog charged into it full tilt, and got the surprise of his young life—for it collapsed, and he found himself somersaulting among clucking, screeching fowls. The birds were Hamburghs, and, true to type, like pheasants they instantly rocketed sky high in all directions.

" Maximilian ! Maximili*an* ! " the lady shrieked, " Maximilian ! Komm' hier ! "—rapidly and quite irrelevantly proceeding to broadcast to all it didn't concern a list of her lamentable husband's domestic shortcomings—as will, regrettably, and upon the flimsiest pretext or none at all, ninety-nine per cent. of married women.

By this time the affrighted dog must have got halfway to Jerusalem ; and, tiring of the air, where there was little picking for birds of their particular feather, the fowls were descending, many of them in the vicinity of the guns. Presently from behind the one solitary hoarding that constituted the station shelter, emitting retaliatory curses which he was careful not to articulate too clearly, shuffled a limping, red-capped porter, in whose rear trickled a squad of artillerymen in various degrees of *deshabille*, all obviously aroused from shaded rest or slumber on the platform.

The soldiers may have had visions of a steaming stew-pot if, to use an unfortunate Americanism, they

could "get away with it"; certainly they lost no time in endeavouring to capture as many of the birds as possible. The sentries "fell" to the general scrimmage, and in spite of scathing execrations from the porter and vehement protestations from his Frau, and amid unearthly yells from the artillerymen, guffaws, shrieks of perverse advice, and the squawkings and feather-shedding of two score panic-stricken cocks and hens, with increasing vigour the one-sided battle continued.

It's a good wind that blows nobody any ill, and you may be sure that it wasn't long before I joined the combatants; and though, like all others concerned, I didn't succeed in laying hands on a single rooster, my eyes didn't forget to note a detail or two about the guns, though why the monsters lay stranded high and dry there at that midget wayside station puzzled me not a little.

When at last we'd managed to get all the fowls, or nearly all, back into the pen, I stood still for a while to recruit my wind and swab my face with my pocket handkerchief. Wildly idiotic as the whole proceeding had been, the idiocy of a crowd can often infect the stolidest person; and after all, isn't it as wise to enjoy a prolonged spell of hearty laughter that comes along on the unexpected instant, however it may arise, as to speculate, say, the best part of a sovereign in a theatre, for laughter which may not come at all?

A glance at my watch told me that it was nearly

seven o'clock, and therefore high time for me to be shinning it along the road to V——

I was on the point of stepping out, when, from behind me, a vice-like hand gripped my shoulder.

I swung round, to confront a corporal, a huge tallow-faced chap still oozing perspiration, but now buttoned up and tolerably trim.

" Hier ! " he growled. " Warte ! " (Wait).

By the ugly glint in his cold-steel eyes I saw the corporal meant business, and I knew there were only two ways of dealing with him : either I had to awaken his risible faculty (if he had any) and make him grin, or I had to convince him that I was a person of overwhelming importance. As I failed to bring myself to the requisite solemnity, I tried to pass the little matter off with a joke.

But the corporal's cold-steel eyes didn't see it, though I " got there " all right with the crowd, who began to ring us. War didn't seem very imminent just then. The boys in grey-green (country-bred chaps, by the look of them) broke into roars of laughter, so much so that the infuriated corporal released his grip on me and swung round on them savagely. Silence came in no time, and with it the renewed attentions of the corporal, who, with additional violence, seized me by the coat-collar and, thrusting his not too pleasant features up to mine, demanded, after casting horrible reflections upon my parentage : " What are you poking your nose about these damned guns for ? " in

his fury misplacing the adjectival epithet, which I fancy he intended to precede my " nose."

Righteously indignant, or at least trying to seem so, I jumped from lively to severe at a bound, and if you've ever witnessed that sight for the immortal gods, a Prussian official in a screaming, collar-bursting rage—that was me. Shaking the man off, I stepped back a pace or two and let him have it wholesale, broadside on. Who the devil he thought I was I didn't know, but I put the wind up him.

" A pretty corporal you are ! " I yelled, " letting your sentries sleep, and you yourself no better ! I should only be doing my duty if I reported you to Berlin. Donnerwetter ! If I did my work "—and here I'd an inspiration—" I mean, if I carried out my commissariat duties as you do yours, my fine fellow, I should find myself inside a fortress before I could say my prayers."

" Sie sind in unrecht " (You are wrong), he began to protest, but I cut him short, and to emphasise my supposed authority I fastened on the innocent porter and his wife, who, sharing human frailty for the spectacle of a row, had lost no time in getting a good view of a promising one.

" As for you, Herr Gepäckträger," I stormed, wagging my finger at the porter, " you will get that wire netting of yours fixed up properly this very evening, and not a centimetre less than seven feet high on all sides. You hear me ? "

And the gaping porter, touching his cap, replied: " Sehrs gerne, mein Herr."

" And if the job is not finished to my entire satisfaction within two hours, when I return this way from my round of inspection," I concluded, " your birds shall be confiscated, every man jack of them " —or words to that effect.

Now the soldiers were gaping, and you could almost have heard a leaf drop. They took it all in, even as the mayor and corporation of Koepenick did the cobbler captain. I glanced at my watch, gave a start of surprise, swept an opening through the ring with an imperious swing of my arm, and the self-appointed Intendantur Offizier—in mufti, mark you !—passed through.

Yes ! I'd wriggled out of that little lot very nicely ; but five and a half miles further on when, hot as Hades, hungry as a hyæna, and inwardly dry as a blast furnace, I reached the main street of a straggling old-world village which might have passed itself off for a small town if it could have scooped itself together a bit ; and whilst a musical clock above the market-hall was serenading a lovely salmon-and-cucumber sunset of pink and crinkly green with the martial strains of " Die Wacht Am Rhein," the wind of conceit was taken out of my sails entirely.

At a sudden corner, hideously clamped by an edifice of corrugated iron—and just, if you please, as my foraging eyes had shown me fifty feet ahead the

welcome dangling signboard of a Gasthaus, whose proprietor, Franz Somebody-or-other, besides purveying Pilsener beer and baked meats, announced that he kept a droschke for hire—what did I do but walk slap bang into the eight arms of four policemen walking suspiciously abreast—" specials " by the look of them, and rigged out in brand-new uniforms so stiff and protesting that they couldn't have parted from the tailor's goose more than an hour or so ago.

Here was a proposition of quite a different calibre, and I knew the four " wanted " me even before one of them—a sergeant, with copious chinchilla whiskers, and no fool, by the look of him—opened his teeth.

Smartly his fingers tapped me on the chest. " You will accompany me," he announced, half closing his eyelids.

" For what reason ? " I asked, fully opening mine.

" You will know soon enough," he said, or rather sang through his nose. " Come ! Make haste ! " He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, and though that thumb pointed accurately to the open vine-clad doorway of the Gasthaus I have mentioned, I fancy the hostelry was not in the sergeant's mind just at that moment.

Though the odds seemed a million to one against me, I wasn't going to march along that village street with the sergeant and his merry men to the lock-up or anywhere else like a stray donkey, without a legitimate try to get out of their clutches. So I tried an effective Teutonic ruse.

Stepping back a pace, I did as most good and clever Germans do when the occasion appears to call for it. First, proudly, I threw back my head ; then rounding my eyes to the full, I assumed a look of the most complete and profound innocence. Gradually into that look of innocence, as slowly the enormity of the (implied) charge penetrated my consciousness, I merged a look of righteous indignation. Next, in mute appeal, and protestingly, I spread out the palms of my hands, and my eyes took on a very pained expression, nicely calculated to say : " Really ! my dear sergeant, is it possible that an undoubtedly intellectual and superior person like yourself could for one moment believe me to be otherwise than an honest, law-abiding, good-natured and simple-minded Deutscher, utterly incapable of wrong-doing ? "

On the top of all that I assured the officer that he was making the mistake of his life.

But he was iron. " There is no mistake, thank you," he sang through that nose of his, and then rapidly he ran a penetrating eye all over me (as policemen past their prime are wont to do in similar cases) in order to estimate, should it come to the pinch, whether a potential Hercules lurked inside my flannel suit. Apparently satisfied that he and his three colleagues would prove more than equal to any violence I might retaliate with, and nodding assuredly to himself : " You exactly answer to the description of an Englander wanted," he again sang through his nose, " and you will immediately come

along, unless you desire to be carried face downward" —which I certainly did not.

And there it was.

Jerking, this time, his head directly up the quiet street, he made a sign to his colleagues ; and deciding to withhold further argument until I gained the ear of higher authority, I stepped blithely forward with my captors along the grass-edged footway, followed by the usual village tail of the curious, and a swarm of dancing, gleeful urchins, who, darting on ahead, and then dropping back, were, all unconsciously, giving an imitation of the swarm of midges that had gathered around our heads. The village idiot, I daresay, was in the throng. I didn't look for him. I felt that I adequately filled the part myself, in spite of my air of amused indifference.

Within the space of three or four minutes our procession, now swollen to such dimensions that it seemed to call for a banner and a brass band, arrived at the court-house, Gefängnis, or whatever was the normal use of the squat, windowless stone building I and my custodians entered ; and by that time the crowd had unanimously decided among themselves that I was no less a notoriety than Jacob Someone-or-Other, a Berliner, who the day before had murdered his own mother !

Though not without misgiving, I mounted the ancient building's foot-worn steps buoyantly, and once inside the narrow arched doorway (in one stride I seemed to

pass out of day into night) I could just discern a pointing hand.

" Forward, first door on the right," commanded the voice of the hand, and forward I went, along a crooked stone-flagged corridor, for whose shade and coolness I might have been grateful under happier conditions.

Through the first door on my right, which stood wide open, followed by my guard, I swung into a small square room lighted by only one window, and that a barred one in the flat oak-beamed ceiling, so high and inaccessible that the bars seemed placed there more to restrain a malefactor from breaking in than from breaking out ; and in that room, but barely furnished, behind an oblong cleanly-scrubbed table, I beheld a gentleman, a tubby, clean-shaven, crimson-faced old gentleman, who greeted me with an amiable smile.

Probably a pensioned inspector deputising for a called-up official, Nature in creating him had frankly tried her hand at caricature. I remember him vividly : his peculiar dark eyes, and how his pince-nez monstrously magnified them ; how the left one kept hopping from side to side like a linnet in a cage, while the other, obviously an article of glass, remained still and expressionless as the brown top button on your jacket. He'd uncommon ears, too : long and pendent-lobed, and (what you rarely meet with on a human head) they were pointed at the top like a faun's. The villagers must have thought him no end of a swell, for he wore a black alpaca morning coat—a drooping white rose

in its buttonhole—an apple-green cravat with a tremendous cameo pin in it, and plenty of starched collar and cuffs.

In front of him lay a large open book, and at his right elbow stood a telephone, a neat little pile of papers, and a wide-brimmed inkstand that reminded me of a parson's hat. On the table, too, lay a walking-stick and a pair of black gloves that once had been yellow.

Clearly he was expecting my arrival, and as I took the stage he had his elbows on the table, his clasped hands, level with his chin, rubbing themselves together as if they were preparing a plug of tobacco for cremation in a pipe. As soon as he caught sight of me he gave a wriggle in his seat, rather like a broody hen settling herself in an agreeable nest, and again I noticed that restless eye of his, and I didn't like the look behind it. And I was soon disillusioned about that smile of his, for I discovered it to be a permanent deception, moulded by two broad prognathous teeth that stuck out like tombstones from the tailboard of a carrier's cart.

A first impression counting for so much with most people—and to create a good one is the most difficult thing in the world unless you know your *vis-à-vis*—I did my best to " get it across," because unimposing and irregular as the setting of the scene was (minus the police, I might have been interviewing a rural pawnbroker in his office), I guessed only too well the importance to me of the old chap's decision. For I

had to remember that war was not only in the air, but already setting its feet upon the ground, and were I to be kept in custody even a week—what then, meanwhile, if England drew the sword ?

I saw that bluff would be of no avail, so hat in hand I bowed to the old gentleman as if he were royalty itself, and wished him an unruffled but most respectful " Guten abend."

But the old gentleman wasn't taking any. Totally ignoring my salutation, he jabbed a forefinger at the space of grey-washed wall immediately opposite him. " Stand there," he said, not loudly, but in so rasping a tone that it would have sent a bull-terrier's tail down and got any man's monkey up. " Stand there with your back to the wall." I managed to keep my temper and stood " there " with my back to the wall, and as I did so, conscious that—non-existent though it was—the steel rail of a dock had suddenly fenced me in, two of my guard stood there also ; one, the chinchilla-whiskered sergeant, at my right elbow ; the other, a knock-kneed youth who had a face like an unlighted turnip lantern and whose *tout ensemble* suggested an overgrown schoolboy masquerading in his father's uniform, at my left.

Kwaugh ! The horrible sound came from the old gentleman's throat, prior to his spitting on the floor.

" Your name is —— ? " (he gave my right name in full), he enquired, wiping his mouth with a white-spotted red silk handkerchief.

Not denying the fact, I produced my passport (which I thought the best thing to do, without delay) and handed it to the sergeant, who strode three squeaky paces across the black oak floor, placed the document on the table, stepped back again, then vigorously clicked his heels.

The old gentleman nipped his eyeglasses on the tip of his undergrown nose, sought out my written name in the engraved document, slid a finger under it, and observed (in German, of course) : " Yes, you are the man I want . . . the man I want," he echoed with almost voluptuous satisfaction.

Politely I was about to ask why I was " wanted," but he beat my first word back into my throat as if it were a tennis ball and his hand a racquet. " You may speak when I tell you to speak," he cautioned, taking from the neat little pile of papers at his elbow the top sheet.

After his one restless eye had travelled all over the paper, he shot it at me.

" You are an English military officer, are you not ? "

I respectfully submitted that I was an English civilian, as the passport implied.

Was I an English naval officer ?

I emphatically declared that I was not.

" What were you doing in Coblenz yesterday ? What are you doing in Germany at all ? "

The cheek of the latter question ! I told him I was holiday-making.

"You speak German very beautifully; you must have studied the language during many years. Why have you studied the language during many years, may I ask ?"

I informed him of my sojourn at Bonn.

"Where have you your luggage for this holiday you speak of ?"

I handed the sergeant the cloak-room ticket. The old gentleman seized it as if it bore the winning number of a Golden Ballot. Though he had uttered no word about espionage, I verily believe he thought an examination of my rucksack would disclose the whole paraphernalia of the spy beloved of fiction: maps, plans, poison, drugs, invisible ink, and perhaps a bomb or two.

Kwaugh! Again the old gentleman forgot his manners.

Scowling at the sergeant as if he, too, were guilty of a heinous offence, he demanded of him "precisely" in which part of the village I had been "captured," and what "precisely" I had said.

"At the corner of the —— Gasse," sang the sergeant through his thin long nose, and he then (to his credit) correctly repeated every word I had addressed to him, the recital consuming the best part of half an hour, owing to the snail-like pace of the old gentleman's pen.

At last my inquisitor laid down his quill, unhitched the glasses from his nose, and—*Kwaugh!* he spat again. The operation concluded, he picked up from a corner of the table something that looked like a

large pepper-pot and sprayed out from it upon the words that hadn't had time to dry (and they were few) a fine stream of sand, which he presently brushed away with the feather of the quill. No; I don't recall the little fact in illustration of the archaic nature of the "Law" in that obscure village in Rhineland, because they still dry ink with sand in most courts of law in Germany, not excluding the Imperial Supreme Court at Leipzig.

The old gentleman leant back in his chair, dovetailed his fingers, and threw up his chin. "And now, young man," said he, and his imitation smile broadened into a hideous real one, "and now, young man, I will tell you why you have been brought here, although you know as well as I do." And he went on pleasantly to inform me that I should have to answer a very grave charge of espionage, which would be formulated later; that I should be detained there in that building until I was claimed by the "authority concerned," which might be the following day; that I should probably be taken to Coblenz, there to await my trial; and that, whatever I might have to say in answer to the charge would have to be said at that trial; that facilities to prepare my defence and instruct counsel would be afforded me—and this was about all the old gentleman said, I think.

He closed the book in front of him, tucked his glasses in a case, put on his hat, picked up his stick and gloves, and turning his head to one side—*Kwaugh!*

he expectorated once more. Then from behind his handkerchief he growled to the sergeant : " Take the man below."

Seeing that further protest then and there would avail me nothing, I humbly bowed to the old gentleman, and after bidding him the friendliest good-evening imaginable and adding *sotto voce* that I hoped it would keep fine for him, I walked out of the room, two of my guard preceding me, and two following.

In the now pitch-dark corridor, a few yards ahead, stood a man with an old-fashioned lantern—the jailer —a creature that the late Phineas T. Barnum would have come to terms with on sight, put among his freaks, and labelled—well, Bluebeard. Having said so much, I needn't say more, except that on further acquaintance I discovered he'd all the bloodthirsty proclivities attributed to his famous prototype. The sergeant introduced me in a few well-chosen words ; I said something suitable for the occasion ; Bluebeard said something else that was rude ; there was a brief battle of ugly looks between us, an interchange of telepathic hate, which can be just as war-inspiring as words, and I was unceremoniously bundled down a flight of stone steps into a dark and evil-smelling cell, whose massive door was promptly and thunderously barred upon me ; and if I wasn't actually in a state of pure cerulean funk I certainly felt about as cheap and miserable as a cast-off slipper in a dust-bin.

. . . . .

I suppose that the " authority concerned " was too much occupied to give me a passing thought. The promised escort didn't arrive for me next day, nor the next, nor the next ; and the hours crawled on, punctuated twice in the twenty-four by the jailer when he came to thrust my rations through the little movable grille in the door. Naturally I wished to get on good terms with the fellow. I wanted to know a few things : whether, for instance, war had started (I had no means of knowing) ; and I wanted above all else to communicate with Townsend, just to let him know where devilish bad luck had landed me—and leave the rest to him : that was all. But Bluebeard, after I'd promised him most of the cash I had in my pockets and an annuity for life if he'd drop a note in a post-box for me, flatly refused, and not only that, declared he would report me for my pains. Thereafter I severely left him alone.

To appreciate my position you must realise the vast difference in mind between Germany and England in those few days when war between them hung in the balance. Germany was on the tenterhooks of megalomaniacal hopes—and, yes, insensate fear ; England, apparently, was holidaying as usual at Brighton, Blackpool, Scarborough—somewhere at the seaside.

To return to my cell : the walls of rough-hewn stone, an iron-sheeted door, a tiny iron-barred aperture high above my head on the level of the street, through which I couldn't have wormed my head, let

alone my body—a thorough examination soon testified to the impossibility of escape: I was even as the stone within a black plum. And after the first few hours I developed such a tyrant of a cold that I think most of my time must have been occupied in sneezing my head off—that and cursing my shortage of handkerchiefs.

Two or three days passed over my diminished head; my watch had seized the opportunity to retire from business, and I could only guess at the daytime hours from the sounds of man and beast that reached me through the barred hole in the wall. Then, one evening, without any preliminary canter, there burst in upon me the noise of great rejoicing; men shouted themselves hoarse, women screeched themselves silly; there were shouts of "Victory"; *Hochs* for the Kaiser and his eldest son; then everyone in the village (so it seemed), with what voices were left to them, sang "Deutschland," and so that there should be no mistake about it they sang it all over again. Perfect pandemonium followed—I'd never heard such a hellish racket—and determined not to be left out in the cold, a peal of church-bells joined in—*crash! bang! crash!* they went, for a solid hour, as if they'd all been beaten flat as shovels and were clashed together by fiends. There was a rejoicing cannon, too—and I forget the other hullabaloos, except that the liveliest of dog fights terminated the proceedings.

That evening must have been a strenuous one for

beer taps and village purses, judging from the unsteady feet and unwise tongues I heard after closing time. There was no doubt that Germany was at war, and if I had to believe the shouts of " Victory," she'd achieved a success. Strain my ears though I might, I failed to catch one word about England. Lord! I couldn't describe the sensations I had in that subterranean hole that night; but I recollect writing myself down an abject, helpless ass.

The sounds of revelry died down; the church bells were enjoying a well-earned rest; the cannon slept; and I suppose by now there wasn't a speck of artificial light to be seen in the village. The clock of the market-hall had just tolled midnight without any musical assistance, and I was sitting on the edge of my plank bed as far from sleep as I was from London, and about as joyful as the occupier of the condemned cell at Newgate just before the executioner gives his final tap on the door, when my ear caught an unusual sound for that time of night. A footstep scraped on the staircase leading down to my den; someone was descending the stone steps—when the whole place should have been locked up and its custodian, Bluebeard, long ago sound asleep.

I knew my gaoler's footfall well, but this one didn't sound like his. There was a stumble, and then someone began fumbling with the latch. Clumsily the huge bolts were tugged back, slowly the door opened, and a burly, bearded figure, holding a dripping candle aslant

in its hand, lurched forward, pushing to the door behind it, but leaving it the littlest bit ajar. It was Bluebeard, after all ; and it was the first time he had condescended to come my side of the grille.

At a glance I saw that he'd been sampling something stronger than lager beer, and before he spoke a word the odour of Schnapps threw itself in my face, and it was as eau-de-Cologne compared with the odours native to the place.

I've implied that Bluebeard was no Adonis, but the grin that now attempted to humanise his ugly Tartar-like visage only rendered him the more hideous. Still, as he had on more than one occasion gratuitously promised to sever my head from my body and cut me up into little pieces, at the same time warning me that he was Siberian born and therefore an hereditary expert at the job, I wasn't sorry to witness the transfiguration. Nor was I sorry to see him sit down on my plank bed on the very spot I had risen from ; and I took the opportunity, whilst he was about it, of stepping back a couple of paces nearer the door—a move he didn't appear to suspect or even notice.

I stood there with my hands at the lapels of my jacket ; and after jamming the tin candle-stand down beside him on my plank bed, Bluebeard began to fumble in his pockets, first in one and then in the other, his fingers all thumbs, for what I didn't know, regarding me the while through his blinking eyelids as if I bore no relation at all to anything in nature,

animate or inanimate. At length from a back pocket of his trousers, in which recess few men get drunk enough to stow away a clay pipe, he drew forth such an article unharmed, and after a prolonged attempt to find the right spot in his face for it, he at last managed to get the short-stemmed thing into a gap between his front teeth.

Bluebeard's hands interested me just then, because in gentlemen of his kidney the degree of drunkenness (like degrees of lunacy) is often more accurately disclosed by the movements of the hands than by the tongue, which latter instrument he soon began to make fluent enough use of.

Miraculously amiable, and offering no reason for his intrusion, he broached the subject of the War. I patiently listened ; and it was from the mouth of this grotesque but physically formidable creature I first heard that my King and countrymen were waging battle against Germany. It was naturally great news to me, and to be frank, and all things taken into account, I was right glad to hear it, though at that time the fact boded anything but good to my own humble person.

Bluebeard, however, soon dropped his war gossip, but not until he had expressed the gory hope that all the Tsar's armies in the East would be beaten back by the Germans, until the Russian steppes were dyed crimson with their blood from end to end ; and after maintaining that Germany was a much happier land to live in than Russia under a Tsar, his well-lubricated tongue betrayed him into telling me (what I'd half

surmised) that he was quite alone " upstairs." He *said* he was lonely !

His pipe was still unlighted. In spite of the application of a score or so matches one after another (the candle stood at his elbow !) it flatly refused to burn, as pipes of all sorts stubbornly will in the mouth of a drunken man. He came to his last match, struck it ; it went out, and pitching away the empty box, he spat an oath after it.

I had a match or two in my pocket, but I didn't offer him one, presuming to call his attention to the existence of the candle. Leaning back, he made a scoop with the leg-of-mutton fist nearest to it—and sent the thing spinning on the flagstones, where the flame promptly extinguished itself.

With the total eclipse of the candle came a chance I was waiting (and scheming) for. "One minute," I said, " I have a match. First let me find the candle " . . . and groping for it I found it—and the edge of the door. In a jiffy I was outside the cell, and by the time it would take him to get on his feet I had the two heavy bolts driven home. I heard a muffled curse—perhaps a command, it didn't matter which ; I struck a match, re-lit the candle and stealthily ascended the steps. On the top one I paused, but only for an instant. The place was still as a tomb. I reached the narrow front door. It was locked and barred ; but luckily the key remained in the lock. I turned it, slid back the bolts (I remember they were new modern ones and but

recently affixed); blew out the candle and cautiously, very cautiously, peeped outside.

The coast seemed clear. I could hear nothing but the whisper of a friendly breeze through a tree on the opposite side of the road. I stepped out ; strained my eyes to right and left ; saw nobody, and softly pulled to the door behind me.

After a diet of black bread and thin soup with a mite of meat and an abundance of bone in it once a day I wasn't in particularly good trim. But it's wonderful what you can do in this world when you want to dodge the door of the next.

Soon after the sun had risen high enough to get an uninterrupted view of my back, and certain remote villagers of the male kind may have been exhibiting a pronounced distaste for breakfast—if they were not still snoring, like organ pipes, consequent upon " the night before " ; and not unmindful of my objectionable gaoler, who I hoped was getting it where the chicken got the axe for a serious breach of duty, I myself was sitting down to coffee, bacon and eggs in the cheery parlour of a wayside inn ; whilst right in front of my window the lively sails of a windmill (undoubtedly Dutch) were flicking merrily an intermittent shadow across the white-clothed table. . . .

Shortly after noon I arrived in Rotterdam.

And that, I think, is all I have to say about adventure number one.

CHAPTER II

WHAT "ADOLF DUNKEL" HAD TO PUT UP WITH

QUITE apart from its ever attendant dangers and perpetual mental strain, the job of Secret Service frequently holds unpleasant surprises that may have nothing to do with the business in hand. It may wound one's cherished belief, for instance, in the incorruptibility of one's own countrymen in high places. Let me illustrate my point with an anecdote—and a true one.

A friend of mine—before the War he'd been just a sporting Squireen with a particular interest in growing black-currants—was "discovered" to possess an exceptional gift for putting his finger on the right man for the right job. At the time I refer to he held a commission in the army; summarily withdrawn from France, he was given instructions (almost carte-blanche), the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and sent away with six picked men to an out-of-the-way spot, which shall be nameless. Indeed, very few were aware of the project, even though the ex-squire-soldier soon had gathered to his little banner many thousands of men,

for the greater part much-needed specialists. And certainly no one even disputed, or could dispute, that all the time he justified his position up to the hilt. But, mark you, the job was coveted.

One day, then, a stranger reported for duty—a youngish chap with one " pip " on his shoulder. He hadn't been asked for ; he'd just been " sent " ; and about himself he was suspiciously mum. A brief while after he joined came his recall ; but—wait a moment—another brief while and he re-joined, this time with an additional " pip." And so it went on, until finally, hall-marked Lieutenant-Colonel, he re-appeared—calm to tell my friend that he had been authorised to take over.

Of course it was all a piece of despicable jobbery, and it left a vile taste in the mouth of those who knew that the supplanter of the boss—and brains !—of the show happened to be a blood relation of a notorious statesman.

Well, in a humble way, perhaps, I too was supplanted, as the result of outspokenness, and I was told to " take a holiday "—which, at the time, I conjectured to mean the irrevocable Order of the High and Mighty Boot.

In a devil of a huff, I enlisted, and eventually was shot across to France to lend a hand in the butchering Any more than the next man I can't say that killing or being killed appeals to me ; but to-day I don't regret my prolonged spell of active service, if only for the reason that I learned on sound authority that I

had become a marked man in Germany ; yes, by George ! figured in the first batch of " undesirables " in her Liber Niger * ; and that her Secret Service sleuths had been nosing high and low for me, even in neutral countries, until one of my colleagues, unhappily mistaken for myself, had been fatally knifed in the back in a Rotterdam by-street.

Needless to say, those who were behind the assassination were left to gloat in ignorance ; their mistake was not explained to them.

Perhaps the incident reminded our own people of my continued existence—somewhere. At all events, one spring drizzly morning I remember I was stuffing myself with a bread-jam-and-cheese sandwich as big as a Shakespeare Folio, when my name was shouted out with that unmistakable inflection which warns Thomas Atkins to shew himself on the tick, even if he happens to be in nature's one and only dress.

Well, I was hauled out of my rest billet, and motored (ye gods ! I couldn't believe it) by a Brass Hat—not a temporary one either—to G.H.Q., and there set before the very big-bug who had commanded me to take a holiday.

I'll say this for him, he bore me no malice—beyond

* Germany's " Liber Niger " contained a list of all persons, of whatever nationality, that she considered her active enemies, whether statesman, politician, professional writer, or what else. Details of their offences against the Fatherland were chronicled against each name, and the whole book was kept posted to date, against the time when those enemies could be " dealt with."

calling me a champion idiot and remarking that a loony with my idea of a holiday would go to hell for a pastime. Anyway, we had a prompt and quite a pretty pow-wow together. It began with two questions :

1. Was I well acquainted with the German town of (we will say) Darmstadt, and its neighbourhood ?

My interrogator ought to have known from the records that the question was superfluous ; and I merely replied in the affirmative.

2. Did I know, or know anything about, a certain General Kurt von Wessen ?

To which I replied that, so far as my memory went, von Wessen was an aged Deutscher, who, apart from a brilliant field achievement in '71, had perpetrated a German military classic, called, I thought, " Taktische Strategische—Aufsatze " ; and that, when last I had heard of him, he was half bed-ridden—or at least fit for nothing but to roost with ruffled feathers in his countryside châlet not far from Darmstadt. To this I added—for what it was worth—that once, before the War, I had the hardihood to pay General von Wessen a formal call, but virtually the door had been slammed in my face.

Quite so. My interrogator beamed, twirled his moustache and in his customary no-time-to-waste manner proceeded to tumble out further information for my benefit. Briefly, it ran thus :

In spite of his eighty odd years, the Germans held von Wessen so highly in esteem that they had wanted

him to occupy the chief chair in the Organisation Department * of the Grosser General Stab in the Konigsplatz. Because of his infirmity, however, the old fighting cock was permitted to remain on his perch, but only on condition that he should ever be "at home" for a military "cluck-cluck." And, from information received—as they say warily in our police courts—it appeared to be the fact that General von Wessen in his advisory capacity received numerous telephone calls from German G.H.Q. in the Field, not to speak of visits from staff officers of dazzling rank, who certainly would not leave their bloody business for the pleasure of chatting with the General about the price of eggs.

Incredible, say you ? Then I can only quote the words of that old Dane, Von Moltke, when Chief of the General Staff of the Prussian Army : "A profound study of theory is almost a substitute for practice," and repeat that General von Wessen, who had won his spurs in the Franco-Prussian War, and held the Order Pour le Mérite, was the Great Panjandrum himself on Theory. Beside his masterpiece already mentioned he had written a miniature library to prove it—and the German General Staff must have believed it all well and truly proved. We, in England, were not wholly innocent of that sort of thing—the fetish of Experienced

* The virtual head of the Great General Staff was, of course, the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm II. There were four main groups—Organisation, Transport, Supply, and Intelligence, each sub-divided into numerous branches.

Senility *plus* Theory ; but later, when I met General von Wessen in the flesh, I felt more at heart's-ease about the final outcome of the War, which at the time rather suggested that the Allies were Selling Platers mistakenly entered for the Derby. But that is by the way.

More information, highly important then but of no account here, was given to me ; the upshot was: Could I see my way to make active use of it ? Could I ? I would have tried to reach the moon in a rocket, I believe, had it been suggested. I felt as if I had been reprieved from the scaffold, and I fancy several million other men will appreciate the sort of " scaffold " I refer to.

Then and there, I was discharged from the Army, given passes, and finally despatched, express freight, for Never-Mind-Where. Still, I can say that at Never-Mind-Where I reported to no less a person than our friend the Professor. It was the first time I had met him personally, and I liked him the moment we shook hands, and soon felt that I could endorse my colleagues' eulogies of the man.

All was cut and dried and ready for me, and you may be sure that no detail had been scamped when I tell you that within ninety-six hours from my last mouthful of bread-jam-and-cheese outside a rest billet somewhere in France—" paff ! "—one, " Adolf Dunkel," a native of South Germany, a " military reject," received back his " papers " after their scrutiny by the Darmstadt police,

with nothing more ominous than a short staccato questioning and a warning to lose no time in getting work such as he sought.

His vouched-for disabilities (heart disease was one of them) remained unquestioned ; and, indeed, they must have been convincing, even on paper ; for when the Fatherland is at War, mind you, a German must be bedridden or buried if he would escape military service of some sort. There was no bracing air of Dartmoor sort o' thing for " Conchies " in Germany ; that breed (nay, did a solitary male in Deutschland outside a lunatic asylum ever dare to declare his " conscience " ?) that breed would have been given no air at all in six feet by two of lime and solid clay within a prison cemetery.

Yes, Germany combed her man-power ruthlessly ; but with the aid of the " papers " provided by the Professor, distorting spectacles which were an optical fraud, teeth " doctored," a sort of wireless telephone receiver affixed against one ear, a suit fit for a Guy Fawkes, and an unshaven jowl you could have struck matches on, Adolf Dunkel, made up like a dog's dinner, slipped into the heart of Germany—one might say through a chip in the comb at that Darmstadt police-station.

Where, Gott im Himmel ! was a fellow like me to get work ? " Weh ! oh, weh ! " Better dead, a fellow like me. " Au, weh ! oh, weh ! "

" Was sagst Du ? " (What do you say ?) Stutter,

stutter, mumble, mumble, wheeze, wheeze, and, subsequently, the lumpish, elderly Polizeisergeant learnt that Adolf Dunkel had heard of a Herr Pig-Breeder beyond the town, who wanted assistance ; and at length, after having filled in a blank " Anmeldung " as long as a ladder, giving particulars of my birth and other details too numerous to mention, I was bidden forthwith to go away (" Heraus ! ") and grab the job lest worse befell.

The Herr Pig-Breeder, please understand, was not invented for the occasion ; the Professor knew better than that. As to the pig-breeder's need of help, any German civilian employer of labour would have welcomed a one-legged, one-eyed, deaf mute ; and certainly, when about 3 p.m. on the same day I presented myself at Plutte's piggeries on the outskirts of a tiny doll's-house village five miles from Darmstadt, Herr Pig-Breeder, metaphorically speaking, shed tears on my waistcoat. I am glad that he didn't do so in reality, for he was a befouled ruffian, and his unwieldy Frau was not much better ; which was not to be wondered at, since—as I soon experienced—sows constantly nosed the kitchen floor of the cottage and rubbed against our legs even while we gobbled up our own meals of " swill suppe," impossible coffee, and bread into which the hard-pressed baker must have scraped the plaster off his walls, not to mention the cobwebs.

By the way, those pigs were jolly interesting. They each had a high-sounding name : one was called Frau

Goethe, another Luise ; there was one named Olga, and yet another called Queen Victoria ! And—here's an item for you—they each answered to their names ; would trot in from the yard at the sound of them ! " Komm' hier, Olga ! " and Olga would promptly waddle straight to the speaker. I've revised my opinion about pigs ; like geese, they're a lot more intelligent than people think.

Frau Pig-Breeder Plutte had welcomed me at sight ; and at first I credited her with human sympathy both for me and my rags ; but when in the same breath she asked me to buy for seventy marks from her an only suit of civilian clothing that had belonged to her son but recently slain in Flanders, I changed my opinion. Nevertheless, I did not actually refuse ; and I kept that suit sharply outlined in my mental vision. Adolf Dunkel, you see, couldn't very well invite particular attention by unnecessarily lugging about with him a portmanteau.

Now, although I had mentioned a definite job to the Darmstadt police, nothing was further from my intention than to tie myself to the pig-breeder. Accordingly, I hedged and haggled with old Plutte ; and finally, after the usual German grumbling on both sides—but I could see that he really wanted me—it was cemented that, in return for a bed, meals and two marks a day, I should " see how I liked it " ; and to promote good-will I at once got busy in the sties, reflecting that there's nothing like a strong dose of the

very humblest form of labour for taking the conceit out of a man, and keeping the soul in order.

The moment marked the end of the schedule planned beforehand. From now onwards my own ingenuity must decide how best I might gain access to General von Wessen's châlet, which, as a matter of fact, stood but a piece away along the country road.

And a fine enough little place it was, nestling among beeches upon a gentle hillside, with its trim carriage-sweep, lawn and gardens. Low white stucco house and all, it reminded me strongly of a parsonage I know in Shropshire—except for the ludicrous, life-size casts of stags, horses and dogs that von Wessen had stuck about here and there in hyper-ornamentation. From an upper window above the front door the heads of two huge plaster watch-dogs grinned and showed their teeth, but I was glad to learn that no live dog was kept upon the premises. The General hated all domestic animals, and the War had claimed his last remaining carriage horse.

He hated women, too, although he had been married three times, his last wife, it was said, having committed suicide.

Oh, yes, this von Wessen had a nice reputation. The peasantry rejoiced in his decayed activity—it took him in the legs—for, among other pleasantries, it had been his habit, following the fashion of Frederick William the First of Prussia, or " Fat William " as he was nicknamed, to salute any one of them, man, woman

or boy, heavily upon the bottom of their backs with a stout malacca walking-stick, often for no apparent reason whatsoever.

Before the War, rather than put up with the General's periodical violence, his men-servants frequently had been known to steal away from the châlet without troubling to take their belongings or bother about wages due. Now, with able-bodied men non-existent, he was, so I then understood, in the hands of women servants ; and bitterly he bewailed the fact. It wasn't exactly a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon for the poor things themselves. True, a gardener, a gnarled old fossil called Diesel, stuck to him. But, then, another situation for Diesel it seemed could only have been found in a better world. Anyway, this Diesel was a crafty old hound, as you shall learn, though it was his very craftiness that stood me in good stead.

All this gossip about von Wessen, and more about the local Baron and the " Geistlicher " (pastor) and his wife I gleaned in the " Ausschank " (tap-room) of the village beer-house, whither I had slouched after my first " Abendessen " with the Pluttes. After a " treat" of cold pork, vile " coffee " had only succeeded in making my mouth dry, and thirsty as a dog in a desert I needed beer, just as much as outwardly I'm afraid I needed a bath ; besides, the local pub, in all countries fortunate enough to possess the institution, is a gushing fount of information, if you know how to tap it ; though it isn't always by shouting drinks round. As to the

War—well, in this sleepy hollow we lay 300 miles from the nearest front, and the conflict was rarely spoken of. No one worried me ; and gradually it dawned upon me that I had been sent in quest of a proper old mare's-nest. Certainly I foresaw no reason why I should be at such great pains to play the part of the half-deaf, stuttering, heart-diseased perishing crock I had undertaken. Jiminy ! your actor will often grouse at a part that keeps him on the stage for an hour or so at a time—what would he think of " Adolf Dunkel " who had to be at it from early rising until bed claimed him again ?—and a rotten pathological part at that !

Diesel, I gathered, percolated into the beer-house three nights out of seven. I found him there next evening—a frosty-bearded patriarch, with a voice like a rusty fret-saw and possessed of what the Deutschers call " galgen," or gallows humour. He cocked a crafty eye at me, the stranger, at once ; and we forgathered over several half-litres of beer accompanied by a thimbleful of Schnapps in a liqueur glass apiece. On hearing my account of myself, he perked up as if an idea had struck him, though he did his best to conceal that idea. Sure enough, by-and-by, when I had primed him a little more, out it popped.

Since I didn't care overmuch for pig work, why didn't I try gardening ? I stuttered out that I only wished I had the chance. At that, another old man on the other side of me guffawed and jogged his next neighbour in the ribs, but Diesel quickly doused their joke

by rasping out sourly that those with still tongues kept full bellies. What he meant I could only guess at; probably he had the ear of someone in control of the food rationing (though this was not in evidence), and it was a threat. Then with a well-feigned show of affection he clawed me outside the place.

He badly wanted help in the General's garden. Would I take it on ?

" Natürlich ! " I should only be too glad of such a job, but I instanced my standing engagement with Herr Pig-Breeder Plutte. Diesel, consigning him and his swine to Phlegethon, assured me that if von Wessen agreed to the suggestion all the Pluttes in Germany might sit on their curly tails and screech for the moon, for all the General cared. The Pluttes, he anathematised, would have to lump it. But hadn't I got a better suit of clothes ? I explained that I could get one, but that my bank balance was low. (Adolf Dunkel's bank balance, that is to say). Whereupon Diesel promised to make it right with Frau Plutte, and even advance me—at trifling interest—twenty marks, as the first instalment for her dead son's clothing. This offer alone would have warned me that the old rascal had something up his sleeve. It wasn't in consideration of natural love and affection—as the lawyers have it—by a long chalk. However, the laugh was on my side soon enough

I said nothing to the Pluttes overnight, and next morning, just as I deemed it high time to broach the

subject, Diesel himself saved me the trouble by suddenly hoisting his nose over the fence and announcing that Adolf Dunkel had to present himself before General von Wessen instanter.

The pig-breeder grunted like one of his own pets; spat, and went on attending to the wants of Frau Goethe or " Queen Victoria "—I forget which. As for me, I pointed significantly to my rags. Diesel nodded, pushed himself through the gate, and stalked into the cottage; and I suppose he squared Frau Plutte, for when, after a tactful wait, I followed him into the kitchen, he was swigging a mug of liquor illegally christened coffee, and the suit lay on the table.

I hobbled upstairs to change and to trim my hair and beard a little; then—the Great Event drew nigh!—Diesel marched me off towards the châlet; and a nice Piccadilly pair we must have looked in the silver spring sunshine. I'll say this for Germany, though, they do seem to buy a brighter brand of weather there. And —out of place though the comment may be—they've better trout fishing. What's happened in recent years to our English streams only the Shade of old Izaac knows.

But there!—I wasn't thinking of trout while being led like a booby to my new job; I was stoking up all the grey matter I possessed; and I leave it to you to judge what Diesel's actual motive was and why the yokels over their beer mugs had twigged the " joke."

We passed up the carriage-drive, then beyond to the

back of the house, where tall French windows opened out on to a beautifully level lawn, offering an enchanting vista of gardens merging in capes and bays into a background of woodland now faintly powdered with green.

And there I met It !

Framed in one of the windows, clad in a green " pork-pie " smoking-cap with a gold tassel, and a dressing-gown of flaming scarlet that matched the hue of his bulbous nose and pouched cheeks, I beheld the redoubtable General von Wessen—an immense man, although he sagged down upon the two stout malaccas that endeavoured to support him.

" Komm' hier ! " he yelled in a voice that occupied the universe, and pointing his right stick at my nose.

Diesel gave me a shove, and as I cringingly crossed the lawn, hat in hand, the voice positively stunned me. " South German, are you ? Lazy dogs, all of you, not worth your salt. I know. Don't you offer *me* a reference, you vagabond—a good word written in favour of one fool by another. Wah ! If a man cannot estimate a servant's character by his face and the first few words he utters, he is a fool also. Your gaol-bird can get a reference. Wah ! I judge men for myself. But you—Thunder ! Why were you born on this earth ? Gott im Himmel ! that I should have to employ a scarecrow that the birds will laugh at ! South German, are you ? We will soon see about that. Wah ! "

Bowing like a clockwork toy, I cowered before him,

commenting inwardly that Homer himself nodded. If my new employer did not wish to see Adolf Dunkel's papers—well, so much the better for me. It was a moment I had particularly feared.

Von Wessen's next outburst almost made me shout with glee.

" Sag' mir " (Tell me), he bellowed. " You have *some* wits, I suppose ? You are clean, and not lousy ? You can fetch and carry, and don't throw fits ? Come, answer me ! "

" Yes, Mr. Field-Marshal—no, Mr. Field-Marshal," I stammered and stuttered.

" Then you start work now. You will attend me in the house when I want you ; and when I do not Diesel can have you in the garden. Six and a half marks a day—and you will have to stir your lazy stumps if you do not want the weight of my cane. Come at eight ; go at seven. Make a sound in the house if you dare. See the damned women and ask them for rubber shoes. Wah ! " He shewed his yellow teeth like a dog. " If they fall in love with you, the sluts, they would fall in love with a chimpanzee. But keep away from them, I tell you ! Let me catch you talking to them and I'll flay you alive. Wah !—Diesel ! "—he dropped his voice—" take him away and put him to work. If he skulks or shirks, report to me at once. March ! "

" Very good, Mr. Field-Marshal, I understand," answered the old gardener. "Make haste! Come along, Dunkel ! "

Playing to the gallery of his master's eye, old Diesel clutched my arm and hurried me away across the lawn to the rear of the greenhouse beyond, where, as soon as I had donned overalls, he brusquely despatched me up a ladder with a brush and a pot of pea-green paint, after ordering me to set about re-coating the framework of the glass roof very carefully, starting first, of course, at the ridge-pole at the summit.

Screened from his master's ken, the old sinner, I observed, was bursting with rapture at having—as he thought—so completely taken me in. I learnt later that for the past month he himself had been compelled to act as body-servant to the General, and writhing under the job, would cheerfully have forfeited more than a month's wages to have got out of it.

But you'll agree that really the laugh was on my side. Here I was, thrust neck and crop into the very lion's den I had set out not very sanguinely to enter ! All the same, from the way the old nigger-driver treated me, and from his sly allusions and insinuations, I gained more than a suspicion that Diesel guessed I was a malingerer and sailing under false colours. Queerly, whenever we worked together in close proximity he was constantly sidling up and gasping out hooky questions concerning, if you please, the German Navy !—such as whether desertion were at all possible ; what was it like aboard a U-boat ; or what was the penalty for naval deserters if caught : were they shot, guillotined,

or handed over to the Scharfrichter with his shining axe ? Why he should have connected Adolf Dunkel, of all improbables, with the sea and naval warfare, or if it were only part of his precious " galgen," I cannot imagine. For my part, whenever I heard him croaking in my ear I itched to get my fingers round his skinny, criss-crossed neck and throttle the life out of him. Really, I never detested any human so deeply as I did that devilish old Deutscher.

At fixed hours, then, I had to attend upon General von Wessen in the house. Under his glaring eye and red-hot imprecations I fetched and carried, scrubbed and cleaned and tidied like a housemaid ; and many a time, when I was conveniently down upon hands and knees, by Jove ! did I feel the full weight of his confounded malacca. Merely his legs were weak, certainly not his arms ; and he suffered from horrible varicose veins. I had to see them often enough, for after the first day, when he found I was fairly neat and nippy, I did everything for him that a nurse-valet might do, except to shave him. In spite of all the harsh treatment he meted out to me, I believe he considered me a " find," and I had often judiciously to play the bungler lest the old war-horse should sniff there was something in the breeze.

Von Wessen lived and slept in the one large and lofty room facing the lawn, and never left it except to enter his " office," a smaller room adjoining, wherein stood a white-tiled Dutch stove, a flat desk, a swivel chair

with padded seat, a safe, an array of black-japanned boxes, and tall bookshelves packed with all sorts of Military Directories, Army Lists and technical works. Upon the desk rested a telephone, a note-pad and pencil, a "list," a large blotting-pad with a folded hand-sheet—both virgin white—and an empty ink-pot made from a favourite charger's hoof. The blotting-pad was set mathematically square with the desk-top; and it needed no superior intuition to realise that the General had taken a long holiday from pen and ink. Every drawer and every box, as I made it my business to find out, was locked, and never did I set eyes on the keys. I soon labelled this room my "mare's-nest," though I took particular notice of its one window—a bow, about three feet above the gravel of the front carriage-sweep, across which it looked out upon a tastefully arranged shrubbery screening the high road.

Old Diesel, I must say, thoroughly knew his own particular job; and in his own graveyard way I believe he loved it—felt that vicarious joy of ownership which many old gardeners acquire.

A curtained corridor and a lobby, with a side entrance, cut off the General's rooms from the rest of the house; and while I was in attendance, not one of the three more or less ancient domestics ever showed a nose beyond the lobby, where the General's meal trays and everything else were placed ready for me upon a table, and where I deposited them again when finished with. Needless to say, I made no efforts at casting

sheep's-eyes or "cupboard glances" downstairs. I slept and fed at the Pluttes' cottage; paying them four marks a day for the privilege.

Three days passed thus, maddeningly uneventful, and I was growing uneasy, for Adolf Dunkel—apart from myself—really existed in living flesh, and I had been given a time limit for the use of his papers. All that had happened so far at the châlet—to my knowledge, that is—was one telephone call, to which, all ears in the corridor, I heard von Wessen bellow in reply.

Although the office door was closed, I was able to take down what he said in shorthand; it was certainly a military consultation, but, to my chagrin, of no interest or value whatsoever.

In the evening of the third day, a Friday, the local Baron, before mentioned, turned up for a game of cards. I hadn't the pleasure of seeing him, but next morning I cleared away the empty bottles, and the General's coppers were sizzling. Bismarck the Man of Iron couldn't have been in it with him for downing beer and Schnapps.

The sight of the breakfast-tray made the old man howl; he proceeded to fling everything within his reach at my head, and ordered me to take myself to the furthest corner of hell. I bolted and was surreptitiously sampling a cup of really delicious coffee—if my job held degradations, it had its perquisites and petty compensations—in the lobby when the telephone bell rang furiously.

I heard the General split the ceiling with an oath, struggle off his bed in sections, go thudding on his malaccas into the office, and snatch off the receiver. Of my own existence he was oblivious ; certainly in his rage he omitted to slam the door behind him, as he usually did. But he quickly sobered down ; and in spite of everything, like his hireling Diesel, it was palpable that von Wessen knew and respected his job. Give the devil his due !

For fully forty minutes at intervals he barked, snarled and cursed into the transmitter, and unlike the spy of fiction who is ever a sphinx, I became so excited that I could hardly keep hold of my pencil. The old man's perpetual bullying—and Diesel !—had succeeded in getting my nerves down ; and small wonder.

It was a call from G.G.H.Q.—from no less a person than General Oskar E. von Hutier.

From von Wessen's words alone I quickly gathered that there was a disagreement among the Big-wigs about an important German offensive planned to take place shortly on the North-Western Front. The names of Ludendorff, Hindenburg, Mackensen, the Crown Prince, and even the All-Highest were mentioned, their opinions criticised, and their personal abilities not infrequently scoffed at by the old man. From this one-sided consultation, I say—and believe me, I'm not stretching things—I learnt enough to render this prospective German attack utterly abortive—*if*, and it was

a big *if*, I could get the information into the hands of our own Staff in time.

And that alone would have put a feather in my cap. But there was more to come.

" Why was not X "—a Staff Officer whose name I forget—" sent here, as hitherto, to put so important a problem before me ? " demanded von Wessen. " Was sagen Sie ? " . . . grumble—growl—grunt—and plenty of *Wahs* ! . . .

" Quatsch ! Was sagen Sie ? Donner ! "

" My fingers no longer can hold a pen ; they are become clothes-pegs." . . . Grumble—growl—grunt. —" The Emperor himself ? Wirklich !—then I suppose I must . . . sehr wohl ! it is settled then. I will confirm my opinion in writing. Ich bin dessen sicher was Ich sage " (I am sure of what I say). " Nein ! Am I a mere ink-trickler that I should want to write folios ?—headings will be enough, to men of sense. Nein, nein ! I say. Send a special courier for it. I do not trust the postal service—never did. You know what leakings there are, even now. It shall be ready in the morning. Ja wohl. Guten abend." He hooked up the receiver with a bang.

Before von Wessen had risen groaningly from his chair I had fled through the side entrance and outside into the small courtyard. I wanted one thing badly—nay, two things. One was a continuance of astounding luck ; the other was just a good-sized sheet or several small sheets of ordinary carbon paper. How was

" Adolf Dunkel " to get it ? The very mention of such a clerkly commodity might give him away. I could not be too careful.

Then memory, and trained observation of trifles, came to my aid. Anticipating my dinner-hour by twenty minutes and dodging old Diesel, I sneaked off to the Pluttes' cottage. I had noticed upon a small table in the parlour—seldom entered—cheek by jowl with a large brass-hasped Bible, such as you may observe in almost any rural English parlour, the pig-breeder's feed-account, delivery and receipt books. And in one of these I found what I wanted—a carbon in use and a " spare " under the back cover. It was a risk—but I took both sheets.

Now, I don't know whether or not the General had consulted his own precious tomes in the meantime ; I do know that when at long last four o'clock came and I took in his customary afternoon coffee, he was sound asleep and snoring—as usual. And I know I dithered with fear lest he should wake before I had slipped into the office and inserted my carbon beneath the thin top sheet of superfine blotting-paper and refixed it under the leather corners of the pad. Really, this was the crucial moment of Adolf Dunkel's adventure, for I had been forbidden under goodness knows what terrific penalties ever to enter the office unless ordered to do so by the General himself ; and although deliberately I have painted him in detestable colours—as the ogre he was, in fact—after listening to his technical talk over

the telephone I knew that he had every faculty alert and alive.

Had he found me in the office he *must* have suspected me, and suspicion by *him*—well, that would have been the finish of me, once and for all.

Welcome music to my ears, his snoring continued ; but what pleased me even more was when, with my heart in my mouth, I stood at his desk and found the blotting-paper still virgin white and without so much as an indentation from the pressure of a pencil.

Von Wessen had not yet written confirming his all-important opinion !

The window I did not monkey with then. I knew I should have a legitimate opportunity later on ; for each day, before leaving the châlet, I had been ordered to draw the curtains in both rooms at dusk. But, obviously, the placing of the carbons had to be done at the earliest moment possible.

To-day my opportunity came sooner than I expected. I might have reserved my tremors, had I known. Returned safely to the large room, I awakened the General for his coffee. To my surprise he was in a bearable temper, though his voice was not modulated on that account.

" You !—what do you call your ugly self ?—close up for the night," he shouted at me, when he had gulped down his coffee. " I shall not want you again until to-morrow morning. Wait !—put my supper in as usual, and knock gently on my office door—gently, you

hear ? Otherwise, I am not to be disturbed. By no one. Verstehst Du ?—then give my orders to the cursed women. Gott Verdammt ! What are you standing there for ? "

I made haste to do as he bid ; but, since it had occurred to me that a little unaccustomed fresh (night) air might benefit the office, when drawing the curtains I stealthily eased back the window-catch. The beastly thing groused a bit, for it was stiff and lazy from want of use.

" Take the tray—and get out ! " the General fired at me when I reappeared ; and except for an unprintable epithet in reply to my supper-taps an hour or two later, they were the last articulate sounds from General Kurt von Wessen that I ever heard.

That evening I took away in my pockets from the châlet a pair of rubber shoes, of which there was quite a shop-window assortment in the lobby—relics of the varying-sized hoofs of my predecessors, I suppose.

After my own supper I chatted with the old arch-ape, Diesel, at the beer-house ; or rather, being in a sweeter mood than usual, he drivelled about the wonders he (and I !) was going to perform horticulturally before summer came. Then, at closing time (9.30 p.m.) I returned to the cottage arm-in-arm with Herr Pig-Breeder Plutte—who, regrettably, was not quite sober ; and having ushered him into the presence of his ominously statuesque Frau, I slunk up to my cubby-hole of a bedroom at the back, where, in the

light afforded by an inch of candle, I enjoyed the luxury of a clean shave.

Midnight found me back at the châlet.

I prowled round. There wasn't a glimmer of light to be seen ; everyone inside was abed. With my ear against the glass of the French windows I listened and could plainly hear von Wessen's somnolent snufflings. Reassured, I crept round to the front of the house again, where gingerly, a hair's-breadth at a time, I prised open the window with two of Herr Pig-Breeder Plutte's worn-down scraping knives.

It took me quite half an hour. I wormed and wriggled myself inside . . . but—well ! you've seen the sort of thing on the stage. And here was I doing a melodramatic turn on my own, minus the dimmed footlights and headlights, a spot-lime, slow music—and, thank goodness, an audience.

In the palpitating hope that it existed, and in pitch-black darkness, I had to *feel* for my carbon impression —and to leave the blotting-pad apparently undisturbed, though I did not bother too much about that or about securely refastening the window.

But there you are again ! Man cannot escape trouble, and least of all in my then particular line of business. You see, the impression was there right enough ; but unfortunately, warming to his work, General von Wessen had written page after page, and I came away with a composite impression of the lot about as decipherable as the hieroglyphic writings of the ancient

Egyptians prior to the discovery of the Rosetta stone ! Nor did I discover the fact until I was well on the way home. Beaten ? Yes—and no ; but I wasn't going to spoil a good yarn by saying so much at the beginning. Why should I ?

What rather intrigues me, though, is this : Which of the two ancient rascals was the more outraged by Adolf Dunkel's mysterious evanishment—General von Wessen, or his cunning old hireling, Diesel ?

CHAPTER III

THE CHARNAY AFFAIR

DURING the German military occupation Brussels was hardly a gay or an inspiring city to dwell in ; theatres —all places of amusement—were closed ; almost every person one passed in the street was attired in deep mourning, the only touch of colour being supplied by the uniforms of Bosche officers ; and adding to the general dullness and misery of the streets I cannot forget the long queues of half-famished men, women and children who besieged the public soup-kitchens, nor the look of dour despair which I observed in the face of every Belgian I encountered. For toward the Fall of '17 I had to pay a visit of a few days to the once lively city, on what my private notebook calls the " Charnay Affair."

Professionally, I suppose, the visit was an unqualified success ; but at the same time it turned out to be a rather painful experience for me personally.

By birth André Charnay, as the name implies, was a Frenchman, and I must say that over and above his courage and dare-devilry, which were of the durable, as

opposed to the flash-in-the-pan variety, he was one of the most likeable men I ever met ; and we knew each other, he and I, for less than one brief hour.

Early in life, and long before the War, certain that one day the wild-cat Deutscher would spring across the Rhine, Charnay had designedly become a naturalised German, and for a time—so I've been told—earned his living in Berlin as a cabaret comedian. But his serious hobby, in which he obtained a high efficiency, was the study of aviation, theoretically and technically. Thus, on the outbreak of War he had little difficulty in justifying his application to join the German Air Force ; and in course of time, as a mechanic at a repair depôt, he learnt to fly.

He learnt, too, many secrets which, as a patriotic son of France, he ought not to have learnt ; and when this knowledge and his own experience in the air grew ripe, Charnay one day took French leave with a German Taube, and homing like a pigeon, brought all three possessions down on the right side of the lines. His descent on his native land pretty nearly cost him his life ; his 'plane, riddled with French bullets, crashed ; and Charnay himself had to be extricated from a fork in a skeleton poplar-tree, having one thigh and both arms fractured, not to mention a twist in his personal machinery that alone incapacitated him for any further combatant military service.

Being exceptionally tough, he mended ; but his difficulties, one might imagine, only started afresh ; for how

was this naturalised Bosche to explain himself satisfactorily to his own fellow-countrymen ? Enough, here and now, that he did so explain.

At the end of ten months' hospital Charnay, at his own earnest entreaty, was drafted into the French Secret Service. No departmental routine for him, he was not that sort of chap ; and his pestering presently gained for him an active trial job which he carried through with *éclât*. Subsequently, in spite of recurring attacks of internal agony, he built up a wonderful name for himself in the Allied " Intelligence," and was given Belgium to work, particularly in the naval interest.

Once again he made good, and late in August, 1917, Charnay got word through to our Admiralty that he had actually contrived to lay hold of certain German naval photographs which would be of priceless value to the Allies, and that he intended to deliver them in person to the right quarter within a few days.

Then followed an inexplicable and ominous silence. The days grew into weeks, and still the British Admiralty were without the photographs, which in importance loomed larger day by day. Our sources of subterranean information in Belgium, hitherto excellent, could tell us no more than that Charnay had last been operating under the alias Heinrich Allerhand, and that his last known address was a tobacconist's shop, now vacant, in a side street off the Boulevard du Hainaut, Brussels.

Charnay seemed just to have vanished ; and "Intelligence," both French and British, after anxiously and fruitlessly putting their heads together, were left to wonder whether he had been captured ; whether he was lying—somewhere in Belgium—helplessly ill ; or whether all the time Charnay had been traitorously double-crossing us, and now for one reason or another had gone back to Germany, his original paymaster.

The questions involved had begun to assume an importance almost as great as the German naval photographs, and I was summoned to headquarters and ordered to Brussels at short notice, to elucidate the mystery. From the outset the job was a teaser, for I had nothing whatsoever to go on, beyond the facts and surmises already related.

To Brussels, then, I went.

As we had been informed, I found the tobacco-shop off the Boulevard du Hainaut unoccupied. A large "À louer" (To Let) bill was plastered across its dirty plate-glass window, behind which hundreds of fly-blown dummy cigarette-packets and cardboard boxes lay tumbled about in the shop front. Concerning the late tobacconist himself I dared make no inquiry. Let me explain why.

To all intents and purposes ostensibly I was myself a German—Karl Plessmann by name ; an elderly, uncommunicative Deutscher, the possessor of an authentic German Secret Service card numbered 27, signed by

Udo von Wedell * and "myself," Karl Plessmann, and bearing inside the official seal, which could be detected only by holding the card against a powerful light.

Forearmed thus, I had immediately reported myself to the Head German Polizeiamt on arrival in Brussels, where I was expected, and there received as a person of distinction. Where the real Karl Plessmann then disported himself I knew no more than the man in the moon. But here was I approaching the enemy police authorities as their own colleague in search of a certain much-wanted Heinrich Allerhand, in order (so it was understood) to deliver him prisoner to Berlin; at the same time, as a British Secret Service official, I was in quest of André Charnay, eager to help him, to conceal his "one-ness" with Heinrich Allerhand, and to relieve him of his precious naval photographs, if they really existed, and if by any manner of means I could persuade him to hand them over to me.

The name Charnay, of course, I never even uttered to the German police. Certainly they did not connect him with Heinrich Allerhand, of whom, indeed, until I declared my mission at the Polizeiamt in Brussels, they obviously knew nothing at all. This seemed conclusively to dispose of the odious suggestion that Charnay had tricked us. The Professor,† who alone

* "Udo von Wedell" was the S.S. official signature of Count Botho von Wedell Privy Councillor to the present ex-Kaiser.

† A "mystery man"—an unofficial Intelligence "Chief," about whom no particulars can be given.

was responsible for the whole scheme, had maintained, rightly, that this was the first question to be answered, and that it could only be answered by boldly entering the enemy's camp, as I had done. Nevertheless, in my equivocal character of German sleuth, standoffish to the military police, I could not inquire about a certain missing tobacconist, whose fate " Karl Plessmann " ought assuredly to know—if the shopkeeper had been " removed " by the Germans. Yet, at that stage, I considered him to be the key to the whole affair.

And then, I was now up against the patriotic Belgians themselves, who had a knack of dealing mysteriously with gentlemen of my supposed kidney. Only let it be whispered in certain circles that Karl Plessmann was specially detailed to run to earth the vanished André Charnay, and any moment I might wake, a ghost at large in the Elysian fields, with no very clear idea how I had got there, unless I could have gained a peep at the next issue of the then surreptitiously printed *La Libre Belgique.*

On the other hand, *all* Belgians—I must say it—were not to be trusted. It would have been foolhardy to set even a hint of my British nationality and purpose circulating among them. I decided, therefore, that to friend and foe alike I must remain Karl Plessmann, although in that rôle I was debarred, as I have explained, from making essential inquiry about the missing shopkeeper and André Charnay, alias " Heinrich Allerhand." There was humour in the situation, no

doubt, though I myself could find little at the time. Indeed, I remember cursing the Professor heartily for an excess of cleverness.

Luckily, inquiry about the vacant tobacco-shop was quite a different affair ; and as the address of the house agent was stated in the " À louer " bill, I at once made my way toward his office in the Rue de la Madeleine.

The agent, a tubby, bearded little old fellow with a dignity that inwardly tickled me, attended to me himself. I could see that he was on his guard the moment I spoke to him in my best polished Hanoverian. He listened woodenly while I announced a wish to look over the shop with a view to a tenancy, then replied in Brussels-French that he knew no German. It was an obvious lie, but I had to come off my perch a bit, all the same ; so in frigid French I repeated my statement, whereupon, with just a suspicion of a hesitant shrug, he took down two keys from a brass hook behind his counter and handed them to me.

" But," said he, still keeping to his Brussels-French, " I must ask you to excuse me from accompanying you, monsieur. As you perceive, I am my own staff, as well as my own principal. If, however, after your inspection you desire to negotiate for the shop, together with the dwelling-house, I shall be agreeable to give you further particulars. The rent," he added indifferently, yet I thought pointedly, " is somewhat high."

" So ? " I rejoined. " And the shop situate in a mean street, of doubtful reputation ? " Which was true.

The house agent spread out the palms of his hands. " Monsieur himself must strike the balance, if he, or a client of his, contemplates a tenancy. For myself, may I say that I am the owner, and have my ideas on the matter."

" Ideas or no," said I, " let us not waste words. The place is marked ' To Let,' and I wish to look over it. That is all."

" Then monsieur will permit me ? " He held the door open for me with a polite bow, and an amused but dubious eye. " I much regret I cannot accompany you," he repeated ; " I cannot possibly leave my office."

" I fancy I shall be able to do without your escort," I remarked icily. " And may I ask you not to tell the town that a gentleman who happened to address you in the German language is after the place ? "

He bowed again, smiling enigmatically. " As you suggest, monsieur," he replied, " in these critical times, as you politely imply, if one is inclined to be a chatterbox it is best to be a careful chatterbox."

" And be good enough to remember the fact," said I, bowing in my turn. It was a threat, and he understood. And I, too, understood quite clearly from the first moment I met his eye that the tubby little old gentleman had shrewdly divined the nature of my

application, and that if he could put a spoke in my wheel he would do so without waste of time.

Short though it was, the interview—and the fellow's exquisite hostility—put me on my mettle. Was the high rent demanded pure bluff ; or did Charnay occupy or visit secretly the tobacconist's shop, with the concurrence of the house agent ? I was inclined to think it was a case of bluff, or perhaps a piece of deliberate leg-pulling ; for, as I have told you, our sources of secret information in Belgium had failed to account for Charnay's disappearance ; and I fancied that the house agent was as ignorant of his whereabouts as the rest of us.

Meanwhile, I marched straight back to the shop and let myself in boldly.

The whole place from top to bottom I found extraordinarily dilapidated—deliberately so, I concluded : a thin undisturbed layer of dust lay everywhere, and, search as I might and did, I could find no footprint except my own.

The windows were shut tight, begrimed and cobwebby ; every door-handle and lock within the house, every electric-light fitting and fixture (except in the shop-front) ; even the cupboard doors, all had been removed ; wallpaper hung down from the walls, and plaster had dropped off the ceilings. From the attic down to the basement-kitchen, the anthracite coal-hole, and the sitting-room beneath the shop, I nosed and fingered inch by inch.

The back door opened on to a small brick-paved yard boxed in by high walls from its neighbours on each side and beyond; the brick paving was green with moss. There was no cellar grating; and, by the way, the window of the basement sitting-room was only a pavement light of opaque glass. But it was the undisturbed dust which shewed that no one except myself had set foot inside the premises for weeks past; and here a chill wet-blanket suddenly enveloped my hopes. Nevertheless, I argued, if Charnay were still alive there was yet the possibility that he might revisit his old address.

I would cheerfully have given a princess's dowry and circlet of gold to have known just *why* the tobacconist had gone. If he had disappeared of his own accord, then there was a good reason for it, and Charnay would know it. Certainly the German police in Brussels did not connect the empty premises with "Heinrich Allerhand," or surely they would have mentioned the circumstance to me. In a bit of a quandary I sat down on the dusty stairs to think things out.

Decision soon came. Having relocked the back door, I let myself out on to the street, locked the front door, and for the benefit of pedestrians shot a pretended critical eye and a shrug of my shoulders at the building from the opposite pavement, then strolled by devious ways toward the headquarters of the Prussian police.

Jauntily I entered, as if I had just bought the place,

nodded condescendingly to the Polizeiinspektor in charge, whom I had met before, and placed the keys of the tobacconist's shop on his desk before him.

" Hören Sie ! " (Listen), I said curtly ; " here are two keys. You will oblige me by having duplicates made without delay."

" Gesaft, gethan " (No sooner said than done), " Herr Plessmann."

" I will wait for them," I resumed, after he had repeated my order to a Polizeisergeant. " Now, will you kindly take down from my dictation this ' Avis,' which I desire to be displayed prominently all over the city, and later perhaps throughout Belgium."

" Sehr gut " (Very good), " mein Herr." He picked up a fountain-pen. " But it will have to go before the Chief."

" Then I must see the Chief."

" He is not here to-day. He is at a military funeral," observed the inspector.

" Then," said I, " the responsibility must rest with me. You know my position, and you understand my authority ? "

The inspector bowed from his chair.

" The matter is most urgent : it concerns the most dangerous spy we have against us."

" Sehr wohl ; it must be as you command, I suppose ; but it is on your own responsibility, Herr Plessmann, please remember that."

I assured the polite inspector that I would shoulder all the responsibility, and proceeded to dictate, under

large headings, a detailed but entirely false and misleading personal description of the " traitor " Heinrich Allerhand ; a warning under penalty of death against any citizens harbouring the culprit, or, knowing his whereabouts, remaining silent on the subject. And I offered a reward of 5,000 francs to anyone of whatsoever nationality who should give information leading to his capture.

I had studied these German police notices too often not to know how to set one out on my own account. My object, of course, was twofold : since it was quite on the cards that the tobacco-shop was being kept empty as a refuge for Charnay, should he need it, I hoped that my ominous notice might drive him there, when I alone would deal with him. On the other hand, if it should result in his betrayal and arrest, I hoped to contrive that he should be delivered into my custody for delivery to court-martial in Berlin, in which case, though the naval photographs might be lost to us, I at all events stood a chance of spiriting my captive away to safety.

Indeed, I could see no other method of setting to work. The probability that the man was dead I had to rule out. Besides, I didn't believe it. I had the idea—a rotten one, I admit—that there was a lady in the case ; that Charnay, neglecting shamefully his honour and duty, was gallivanting. My only excuse is that I had recently come across just such a defection in another colleague.

Having settled the " Avis," got it word for word to the stereotyped form, I asked for a Berlin newspaper, the *Lokal Anzeiger*, over which, in an anteroom, with my heels on the stove, I indulged in a much-needed nap.

At half-past four I was awakened by the inspector pressing the original and duplicate keys in my hand. I compared them closely, shook off my drowsiness, lit a cigarette, wished him " Guten tag," and marched out of the room.

" The ' Avis,' Herr Plessmann ! " he called after me. " It is in print. I got the Chief on the telephone. He says it is all right, and can be issued, bearing the stamp-signature of the Gerichtsherr " (the Military Governor of Brussels). " When do you want it issued, Herr Plessmann ? "

" This instant ! " I snapped, jibbing at his covert message to the Chief, yet relieved that my commands had been officially sanctioned. Then, in afterthought : " And will you see to it, please, that I am left alone—not recognised in the street, you understand—by your subordinates whilst I am in Brussels ? My description is easy ; give it to your men. Tell them also that I shall always wear this abortion of a green, white, and blue tie, and a large silver horse-shoe pin ; and as you will not find a similar combination inBrussels*——"

* The Belgians had to be more than careful about any little colour-scheme in their clothing. No citizen of Brussels for instance would have dared to display a combination of red,

But the inspector smilingly interrupted me with, "Jedermann weisst es!" (Everybody knows it!) "You shall not be recognised nor spoken to, Herr Plessmann, I promise you."

Then with another "Guten tag" and a pompous clearing of my throat I hurried out into the Boulevard, flattering myself that I had enacted a little scene which, for sheer duplicity, bluff and consummate lying, would have vastly intrigued my friend the late Sir Hawtrey.

Having again entered the house agent's office, I gave back to him his keys.

"Monsieur," I growled with a shrug of the shoulders, "I have wasted my time. Your shop is a dog-hole, made, I should say, deliberately untenantable; and I suspect you intend to keep it so until after the War—eh?"

He queried me above his spectacles. "Eh bien, monsieur," he flung back with an amused chuckle, "take it how you will, but at least I can assure you that it is not haunted."

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white and blue—suggestive of the French tricolour and the British flags—for his immediate arrest and punishment would have been certain. Nor were the Belgian colours allowed to be seen after the 1st of July, 1915. Thenceforward Belgian men distinguished themselves by wearing an ivy leaf in the button-hole; but, soon, the Germans themselves adapted the emblem, whereupon the Belgians promptly discarded it. The green, white and blue tie donned by the Narrator could therefore offend no one and, as he implies, it was "noticeable"—in a conglomeration of very dull raiment.

At the word " haunted " I dropped pretence and adopted the overbearing " beamter " (official) attitude. I spoke, too, in German. " Herr House Agent," I rapped out, " you will do well to remember that in these times a chatterbox may quickly find himself in jail." And with that I left him fumbling his beard ; and I hadn't got more than fifty yards away from his office when I saw something that pulled me up with a jerk.

It was a poster, affixed to a large board which was roped to some railings, a poster of flaming scarlet that served, only too unpleasantly, to remind me of the fate which lay in wait for myself unless I were extremely cautious, skating as I then was on the glassy edge of eternity.

I could hardly repress a shudder, for upon the " affiche " the first words that caught my eye, by reason of their bold lettering, were : " Ont été fusillés aujourd'hui en vertu de l'arrêt du Conseil de Guerre," and then I read the names and aliases—all Belgian or French—of six male victims of the firing squad, among which, however, the name of my man did not appear. Martyrs to liberty, their only monument was that same scarlet " affiche " which within a few hours would be soaked by the rain, torn away and despatched by the winds into the gutter.

It set me thinking, I tell you.

I hurried home to my lodging in the Rue Evers, a little street running along one side of the grim Gendarmerie.

I had been recommended there by the German police themselves; and my landlady, a raw-boned young Flemish widow, with two German police already billeted on her, had strict orders to keep a silent tongue in her head about my comings and goings. Not that they were at all necessary, because the woman made no secret of her love for Germany and Germans.

Now, except to lunch at the Brasserie Meyer, in the Rue de la Montagne, for two whole days I never stirred outside my lodging. It required an effort of will, for my room was about as cheery as an undertaker's shed, and my nerves were all on edge lest my scheming should have over-reached itself.

From my curtained windows I watched like a hawk the Gendarmerie prisoners' entrance almost opposite, and each time the prison van rumbled along the street and disgorged its wretched, manacled occupant, or occupants, I held my breath in suspense—and this although I knew I should be officially informed at once if Charnay had been located or arrested. Frankly, I began to get the wind up.

Upon the third day, after luncheon at the Brasserie Meyer, I managed to drift up behind a knot of people of both sexes at the lower end of the Rue de la Montagne, who were staring at the very police-notice I had ordered to be displayed. Apparently they were all Belgians, for they preserved a dour silence. But just as I was about to turn away, a ragged old man with

yellow-white beard and moustache and intensely dark eyes touched me gently on the elbow.

" They will never catch him, m'sieu," he said volubly in perfect French. " Too clever. You cannot catch the wind. Yesterday, perhaps—to-day, no. Believe me, I know what I am saying."

" Are you not being indiscreet, Daddy ? " I murmured kindly, hoping to draw him out. " You don't know who may be listening."

" It is all one to me," he replied boldly. " I am a Frenchman. I never yet feared a Prussian. I fought them in '71 and would like to fight them again. Mon Dieu ! did not I try to enlist the day War was declared ? But alas ! they told me our glorious army had all the men it needed, was full up ! No ; monsieur là "—his thumb jerked imperceptibly toward the notice on the wall—" monsieur là need not fear me. Not all the golden money the Boches could make in their mint would tempt me. No ; if they threatened me with torture, death, I would not speak ; not one word that they could use against monsieur là."

I had edged him away from the others. " Mon cher monsieur," I said in undertones, " if you know where he is and will not speak of him to anyone you may deprive your good compatriot of a message from a friend."

The old tatterdemalion refused the delicately proffered bait, and drew himself up proudly. " You will excuse me," he exclaimed, raising his voice. " No friend would

wish to send a message—now, in the face of that placard."

I could see that he suspected me (doubtless he distrusted my accent), that he intended to draw unwelcome attention upon me, and to avoid an awkward scene I turned on my heel and crossed to the other side of the street.

Growling ejaculations—an oath—followed my ears, and then, unmistakably, angry hissing. I swung round on the kerb of the opposite pavement, but already the little knot of people was dispersing. The old Frenchman had vanished.

But the old patriotic " Franzose," no doubt in his dotage and, for all I could tell, more or less " cracked " —his words had the ring of truth. That he knew something about Charnay, his person and his habits, I was convinced ; and rightly or wrongly he had succeeded in persuading me that André Charnay, the object of my quest, was alive, and in Brussels. More than that !—something was hammering into my brain that sooner or later I should meet Charnay face to face at the tobacconist's. I had encouraged the notion when I ordered the duplicate keys to be made ; and I cursed myself for having wasted three nights already ; cursed what I now thought a blazing piece of indiscretion, if not idiocy, in issuing an altogether dangerous poster—and reviled my facile cleverness generally. I don't often feel like that, but I did on that occasion.

During my Brussels visit the calendar gave no promise of a moon, and except for a speck of light from a street lamp here and there the city o' nights was outwardly one vast catacomb over which a sinister darkness brooded. The boulevards, once so brightly lit, and crowded with gay and throbbing life, were now deserted, except for prowling military police and a band of paltry native spies in their pay, who crept about like famished thieves, seeking their victims in the poorer quarters of the town.

That night the sky had been black as a tinker's pot, and a chill, slant drizzle, which seemed to drive against one's face whichever way one turned, had come to make the streets more woebegone still, when, at about a quarter to eleven, seizing my opportunity, I slipped inside the tobacco-shop, unseen and unheard, so far as I could tell.

Having locked the street door behind me, on tiptoe, with a periodical flicker from my electric torch, once again I overhauled the premises from top to bottom, and this time it was with "gründlichkeit" (thoroughness).

There appeared to be no fresh footmarks in the dust, but, resolved not to crab my programme by further indecision, at length I settled myself down, prepared to spend a night of patient waiting in a corner of the basement sitting-room directly beneath the shop.

I chose that room because I anticipated that if anyone entered the house, provided with his own duplicate key, he must steal in from the street, and thus

possibly I might be forewarned by sounds, or by his passing shadow on the pavement glass, which now showed an oblong of faintest light, in spite of the blackness outside.

The back door, I knew, was bolted as well as locked ; Charnay could not enter that way. Strangely, I was still unaccountably sure that he would come—on this, or upon a succeeding night.

It was the eeriest, weariest wait I ever had—the place still as a tomb, and much less comfortable ; for the floor was of wood pulp, hard as concrete—hadn't I trod the stuff on the decked roofs of steamers' wheel-houses, where no amount of caulking had kept the interior dry ? Yet I chose it in preference to contact with the slab of rusty iron in the middle of the floor, upon which a stove had formerly stood.

How long I waited I don't know ; hours, without doubt, during which not a sound reached my ears from within the premises, nor a footfall from the street. If I said that ice-cold water did not seem to trickle down my spinal column now and again I should lie ; it did—just as much as if, alone, I had undertaken to pass the night in a haunted house.

It passed, and I began to feel drowsy ; I had a struggle to keep my eyelids open.

Then suddenly, while my tremblingly tired eyes gazed at the dim pavement light above my head I heard something.

Nothing much : only a slight, audible disturbance of the air in the room . . . but it was enough to give me gooseflesh.

Was the door opening ? . . . Had someone crept downstairs without my hearing a sound and trapped me ?

I would have sprung to my feet, but I felt paralysed, and then in the pitch darkness I *saw* something : a blur, slowly taking shape in the middle of the room.

Again I made an effort to regain my feet—and then I froze, for a low, hoarse, mocking voice that seemed to come from nowhere said in German :

" I thank you for that movement, my friend, but do not stir again, you there in the left-hand corner beneath the street. Have a care, because I hold a live grenade in my hand. Who are you ? "

" Is that you, Charnay— ? " I began, so terror-stricken that English sprang to my lips, like a mother to the protection of her child.

" Who are you ? " again demanded the voice. " A name may be too much, yet not enough. Quick, my friend, your name, and why you are here ? "

" The *Agamemnon* will coal at Cherbourg," I found breath to answer.

" Ah, that is better," came the hoarse voice again. " And how many colliers will she need ? "

" Eighty-one."

" A strange number."

" It is the official number of the man I have been

sent by London to find. It is good enough, is it not ?" I added, on tenterhooks. I was sure of my man ; was he as sure of me ?

"Will you please repeat the number you mentioned ?" resumed the voice.

I did so.

"And your last phrase : will you please repeat that ?"

I obeyed.

"Very well, monsieur," came the reply ; "I am satisfied, and I, André Charnay, thank you. I am always pleased to meet an Englishman. I have known many, and never a bad one. But, alas, we meet in ill-conditioned surroundings, which I trust you will excuse. You see, monsieur, I am—how did they say it when I was at London ?—yes, about 'done in.' I have been prisoner here for ten years, it seems. And I have to apologise, monsieur, humbly, that dreadful as this meeting-place is, I am also—what you do call it in English ?—yes, I am drunk.

"Notwithstanding, monsieur," he continued, "will you come down to me in my cavern ? But show no light, please. Come toward me, will you ? There is a hole in the floor. It is but a short drop to the box on which I am now standing."

I crawled forward to a man-hole in the floor which had been neatly concealed by the overlapping iron slab, so neatly indeed that hitherto I had not suspected it to have any use apart from the vanished stove,

although I had tried vainly to get my fingers beneath the edge of the slab, which seemed welded to the floor.

I gained the edge, twisted round on my knees, and without hesitation lowered myself into total darkness. I felt my ankles gripped, and my feet guided safely upon wood. I let go my hands, and at a touch from my invisible friend stepped cautiously down on to solid flooring.

" Pray move aside a little—*so*—while I lower the lid," said Charnay.

I heard him step up on the box, heard the slab settle itself, and the sounds of a bolt being pushed smoothly home.

Rum situation, wasn't it ?

A match fizzed, and in the dim, yet to me dazzling, light of a candle we stood blinking at one another.

Poor André Charnay ! I can see him now : his dead-white skin-and-bone face, his attenuated body twisted with intestinal pain ; and yet he was endeavouring to smile ! And, as he had admitted, he was drunk —not in the vulgar way, mark you, but just—well—saturated with alcohol, which alone must have kept him alive. Poor devil ! He was, I think, the most pitiable wreck of a man I ever beheld—off the battlefield. We stood, I discovered, in a small chamber —and fairly fuggy it was—about ten feet square, lined with match-boarding. There was a little door one side with a grid in it, and I suppose there must have been some sort of ventilation. Empty bottles, wine and

spirit—scores of them—were strewn upon the floor in one corner between two small packing-cases. In another corner stood a cylindrical ten-gallon oil drum, and I don't know what litter—yes, I think there was a large biscuit tin, and along one wall lay a mattress. And that's all I can recollect of Charnay's subterranean hiding-place.

Well, there we stood blinking at one another; fumbled for a handshake; and when we gripped I gently took the candle from him with my free hand, for his trembling fingers spilt the wax, and I judged he was perilously near a breakdown.

I had to force myself to speak calmly. " It is jolly good of you," I said, " to—well, after all, to take me on trust."

I observed that he was doing his best to pull himself together. " I am not often deceived by my fellow-men," he returned. " But perhaps you had better explain a little further. Not that I doubt you for an instant," he added quickly. " You speak French ? "

I confessed that I was better at German.

" Then let us talk in the jargon," he replied. " My English is not—up to much, eh ? "

" But not another word, please," I insisted, " until you are stretched comfortably on that mattress."

With a faint shrug and a smile he obeyed. Curled up on his side, he pillowed his head on his crooked elbow and gazed up at me eagerly, wonderingly, like a child expecting to be told a story.

I had one to tell him, and after seating myself on one of the packing-cases, began to explain what I, " Karl Plessmann," had been at in Brussels ; and when, feeling somewhat doubtful how he would take it, I brought myself to speak of the German police " Avis," which I had bluffed the authorities to " issue on my own," not forgetting the reward of 5,000 francs proffered for the capture of " Heinrich Allerhand," Charnay became convulsed. He struggled to sit upright, and with tears trickling down his cheeks begged me to stop. Palpably his laughter pained him acutely.

" The fools ! " at length he gasped. " The sheep-headed fools ! Yes, if I may say so, perhaps it was unwise—a little rash—of you to do it ; but—I forgive you with all my heart for the sake of the excruciating jest.

" Donner ! And what a jest ! It is colossal ! It is magnificent, I tell you ! You persuade the Chief of Police that you are a Special from Berlin. You get the sheeps-heads to print and paste the notice on the walls. Himmel donnerwetter ! Why, it beats the cobbler captain of Koepenick by the length of the Friedrichstrasse."

His pain re-attacked him, and after stifling a groan he added in French, not without effort : " Ah, you English, with the serious faces, who take your pleasures sadly ! We do it only ' pour la patrie ' ; you, damn you, you do it for the fun ! "

I allowed a few moments in which he might recover

himself, then more soberly I continued my story, enquiring incidentally if he were acquainted with the tattered old Frenchman who had addressed me in the Rue de la Montagne.

Charnay, it seemed, knew him by sight and had heard his history: a French aristocrat beggared by the Deutschers' total destruction of his château near Liège, a disaster which had unhinged the poor old chap's mind. " He is what you call in English a gentleman of the old school," Charnay supplemented. " He would never give me away—never ! But," he hurriedly proceeded, " are not we forgetting what you came to see me about—the photographs ?

" Pray give my sincere apologies to the Admiral who wants and waits for them. Tell him from me—and he will understand—that serious illness prevented me from fulfilling my promise. It is the truth, upon my sacred oath, as you can see for yourself. Here they are."

He undid his shirt, and from a wallet attached to a webbing belt next his skin pulled out a small oilskin packet, which he handed to me, and in turn I tucked the packet in an inside waistcoat pocket.

" And now, my dear friend, about yourself," I suggested. " You must have medical attention at once——"

He interrupted me by raising an emaciated hand ; an indescribable look of despair overshadowed his fine but rugged features.

" It is too late—too late ! " he answered softly. " I am past all doctors, monsieur. . . . I am going West, as your troops so beautifully paraphrase death. I am about to meet my last Adversary—the One that vanquishes all of us." Then, after a silence, he gripped his hands together above his head, and the words that followed sounded like an incantation: " Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu ! " he repeated, " and I am only thirty years of age ! "

Gently I remonstrated with him, struggled to utter cheery words, and told him that by some means I should endeavour to get him safely away from the place. But again he interrupted me.

" It cannot be, monsieur," he said firmly. " And, besides, I do not wish it."

" How have you managed to exist ? " I enquired.

He made no answer, only pointed to the heap of empty wine and spirit bottles in the corner, and the biscuit tin.

I told him that it was more than a month ago since he had promised to despatch the photographs, and asked earnestly if I could not, at least, communicate with any friend he might have, to see to his wants. But he wouldn't listen to the question, and waved it off with an irritable sweep of the hand. I saw that he was in no condition to talk overmuch, and that he fidgeted for me to go.

I couldn't think of what to do or say, and I sat awkwardly silent. Presently he smiled faintly from the mattress and spoke again.

" I am glad you found me," he said. " But you got here only in the nick of time. I have just—how do you say it in English ?—yes, *sticked* it because I thought you might perhaps come and find me, and then, as the Yankees say, I could deliver the goods.

" I despaired, though—you were so long. Yes, I heard you searching about on your first visit, but I was not sure. I thought maybe a grey-green ferret * had found my lair at last, and as I was very ill indeed I laid low.

" To-night I knew you meant to wait for me. One's senses, as you know, get keen as a terrier's in this infernal profession of ours ; and I at last resolved to find out who you were. It has cost me something," he added, placing a hand below his heart.

" You were kind enough to mention friends," he went on. " I have none that could help me. Wipe that out, as you say in English. And how could Herr Plessmann, a Bosche, with no British or French credentials upon him, approach any friend of mine in Brussels ? You would be knifed or bulleted on uttering my name. Be assured that you are already known all over Brussels for what you are not—a high-grade German spion. Let me warn you to be careful, my dear friend. And remember that you have the photographs to deliver to your people—if, alas, it is not too late."

* A reference to German military police.

Well, I still sat there, on one of the packing-cases, as I said, under a sort of hypnosis. I liked the chap immensely, was oddly drawn to him. Wreck that he was, he'd a personality, a charming one—that indescribable " something " that grips you and lets you know you're not in the presence of a mere human automaton. But I knew as well as Charnay did that I sat in the chamber of Death. Death peered through his remarkably fine eyes. There was no mistaking it. I had seen it often enough to know.

I am no sentimentalist—the term is only a euphemism for the creature who craves after and wallows in emotions he doesn't have to pay for ; but upon my soul, had Charnay even suggested it, I verily believe I'd have got him out of the place and risked giving him a pick-a-back—any old where. Which, of course, would have been the stupidest thing conceivable.

I knew it to be futile ; but again I was urged to tell him that I couldn't leave him where he was. It was not only un-Christian, but inhuman.

He'd have none of it. No ; he struggled—slowly enough—to his feet, as if to say plainly and politely that our interview was at an end.

" My friend," he exclaimed in farewell, " see to your pictures. There is no time to lose. Get away with them ; and for heaven's sake don't worry about me. I am ' quite all right,' as you say in your own noble tongue."

He seized my hand, held it, and I noticed that his

lips trembled as he smiled at me wistfully, looking straight into my eyes . . for the last time.

And so I left him.

What else could I do ?

Through the shop's front door I let myself out into the drizzling streets. Not a soul was in sight, and I encountered no one until I'd got half-way down the Boulevard du Hainaut, when from the cavernous shelter of a portico two becaped human forms darted forth and held me up under a lamp-post—a white-moustached German police-sergeant and an under-officer.

" Herr Wachtmeister," * I remonstrated with an air of injured innocence, and at once producing my magic ticket, " at headquarters I left strict orders that I was not to be accosted—recognised in the street by the Polizei. My description and address, I understood, were given out to you all, days ago."

I saw the sergeant's subordinate nudge him ; heard him mutter " Die Krawatte," and—" Your pardon, Herr Plessmann ! " ejaculated his chief with sudden inspiration ; " I failed at first to recognise you. I now observe you are wearing the strange necktie and silver horse-shoe pin ! "

" Ja wohl ; " I answered ; " and had not you better

* If you should wish to ingratiate yourself with a German policeman, call him " Herr Wachtmeister " (Sergeant of Cavalry). He will become all smiles, even at three o'clock in the morning.

take a good look at my face, Herr Wachtmeister, and remember it for the future, if you don't want me to be knifed by a crazy Belgian patriot ? Gute Nacht ! " And with that I proceeded on my way, my footfall beginning to awaken a mocking echo somewhere above the housetops.

For the rest of my walk to my lodging in the Rue Evers, as if the patrols had swift and occult means of signalling my coming to one another and obligingly clearing themselves out of my path, I passed no other police—no human being at all. Never in my recollection had boulevard, street, even lamp-post and dripping tree in Brussels, appeared so forlornly miserable ; never had the rain, tinkling down the gutter-grids, sounded so dolefully ; and a strange sense of my own " aloneness," as well as the poignant recollection of my recent interview with poor Charnay, did nothing to enliven my depressing thoughts.

If only I could get in touch with the old Frenchman ! He, at least, might be able to do something for Charnay in his last hours. Or had I better risk communicating with a Belgian priest ? Then, again, there was the house agent ; although he might be totally unaware of Charnay's existence in the flesh even, yet the more I thought about the old fellow's attitude to me in his office, the more I became convinced that he stood on the side of the Allies, and was therefore to be trusted. Yes ; I could write him an anonymous note explaining the young Frenchman's—there's only one

adjective that fitted it—horrible predicament, and invoke his aid. Something had to be done, whether it incurred Charnay's displeasure or not, and as soon as possible.

Arrived at my lodging, I crept up the staircase, careful to avoid two particular stairs that creaked, and having entered my room and closed the door, I set about changing my suit. The photographs, I—no, I am not going to give it away even now, because it was one of our pet little dodges that deceived the Germans time and again, and may have to deceive them, or somebody else, in years to come. But I wrote the letter to the house agent, which I intended to drop into his letter-box on my way to the Gare du Nord, where, other things being equal, a very early train would provide for the first stage of my flight towards home.

Perhaps I'd been in the house for three-quarters of an hour, and I was preparing to whisper to it and its occupants a long farewell, when unusual sounds from outside startled my ear—a man's cry, as if for help; a scuffling; sharp words of command, and then the fall of measured feet.

I tiptoed to the window, and cautiously—so as not to be seen—drew aside the curtains a little.

The night had gone, and the first breath of dawn had thinly shrouded the Rue Evers with mist. The rain had ceased; and I could just make out approaching from the top end of the street a little procession.

Even then my breath caught, and something sent me hurrying downstairs to open the front door and see what it was all about. I afterwards wished I hadn't.

To the left I peered from the top doorstep, and first I saw the upright blades of four drawn swords, then four dull figures in grey that carried the swords, and between the first two military police—for that's what they were—a form in dark civilian clothing—a man.

On they all came toward me ; and then, in a little cascade of greenish light which fell from a lamp that hung out from the Gendarmerie wall, I beheld the face of the prisoner, a leaden, haggard, all-to-pieces face that I shall never forget—and it was André Charnay's. His eyes were closed.

Over and above the four police, and Charnay, there was someone else, someone who walked alongside the two besworded policemen in the rear, a few feet away from the pavement—a white-bearded old figure in which I recognised, even as I guessed, the aristocratic but tattered old Frenchman. And now among the six I discovered yet another face familiar to me—that of the white-moustached sergeant who had held me up in the Boulevard du Hainaut. With a colleague at his side, he strode along the kerb behind the two who were dragging Charnay along by the arms.

I beckoned the sergeant. " Herr Wachtmeister," I called softly, descending the steps ; and unreluctantly he " fell out," stepped toward me, and we met in the

middle of the road, where he saluted with his sword, clicked his heels together, and wished me " Guten Morgen, Herr Plessmann."

" Who and what is your prisoner ? " I asked, more or less indifferently.

" I do not know," answered the sergeant, without adding any opinion.

" But why all the fuss ? " I enquired.

The sergeant sharply lifted his bushy eyebrows. " The man has committed a very grave offence, Herr Plessmann, a very grave offence."

" Really, Herr Wachtmeister—— ! "

" Yes, Herr Plessmann. Not long after you spoke to me in the Rue du Hainaut the fellow came up to me reeling drunk, and when I interrogated him—as was my duty—he slapped my face. We grabbed him, natürlich ! But, Herr Plessmann, as if his offence had not been grave enough, at the top of this street he must call out ' Vive la France ! ' three times. We quickly choked that in his throat."

What further comment could I make after the sergeant's statement ? I'd simply no syllable left to utter ; and, remember, I had to leave Brussels with the photographs then and there. Too late—utterly out of the question now to claim Charnay as my quarry, " Heinrich Allerhand."

The sergeant, interpreting my silence as that I was no longer interested, saluted again, swung round, and followed after his prisoner, who had been pushed and

pulled through the little door within the larger side-door of the Gendarmerie. The sergeant was the last to step through, and the door closed behind him.

I had turned away, feeling goodness knows how, when I heard rapid footsteps approaching me, and an angry voice came over my shoulder.

" Sacré Nom de Dieu ! " it hissed and spluttered. " Villain, you accursed villain ! " I wheeled round—and met the face of the old Frenchman, distorted and twitching with rage.

" Spion ! Spion ! Filthy German spion ! Assassin ! " he screamed at me in his own language. " How I wish I could have strangled the life out of you that day in the Rue de la Montagne ! "

His fury made me flinch—I never felt so cheap ; and I slunk away from his shaking, threatening fists back into my lodging, and shut the door upon him.

But I could shut no door upon my thoughts.

André Charnay died in his cell at exactly nine o'clock that morning. He now lies in the Cemetery of St. Josse-ten-Noode, in Brussels.

CHAPTER IV

I AM CAST FOR A DIFFICULT PART

You may remember, or have heard of, a little essay in fiction entitled "The Riddle of the Sands," by Erskine Childers. The book, first published about a quarter of a century ago, purported to be the unravelling by two British amateur yachtsmen spies of a German plan to invade England from seven tiny little seaports in East Friesland; and the expeditionary force, if you please, was to be towed in barges all the way across the North Sea.

A worthy judge of my acquaintance once remarked that it was a disgracefully provocative un-Christian book, in spite of its manifest absurdity. Well, his opinion reflected Britain's "innocence" at the time; but the truth remains that many years ago the Germans *had* worked out such a plan with their usual *gründlichkeit* and meant to use it, until its arrant futility was recognised at a full-dress rehearsal. They had other plans, too, for the invasion of England; among them, the tunnelling of the North Sea; but this project, though worked out in detail, did not get beyond the theoretical discussion of their naval

and engineering experts in solemn conclave assembled.*

Anyway, to come back to the " Riddle of the Sands," it was not to be denied that quite a number of small craft, handled by amateur yachtsmen, some flying the burgee of a recognised yacht club, some not, hovered from time to time about the East Friesian Islands and thereby often picked up things other than bronzed epiderms, wild duck, or the practice of seamanship. For myself, I may say that, even after the lapse of so many years, I still feel confident that I could navigate to-morrow a 7- or 10-tonner anywhere in or about the shallow sand shoal-infested waters from Borkum at the mouth of the River Ems to Wangeroog at the base of the Heligoland Bight.

But our zeal over-reached itself; the German Admiralty became actively suspicious; and finally two young Britons, Captain Trench, R.M.L.I., and Lieutenant Brandon, R.N., were arrested, tried for espionage at Borkum in August, 1910, and sentenced on December 22nd following, at Leipzig, to four years' detention in a German fortress.

* Immediately Great Britain had declared war upon Germany a certain English writer of fiction, who did not know of this project, was so convinced that the Germans had practically completed the titanic task that he never went to bed until he had dragged several of our Intelligence officials at the W.O. down to a disused chalk-pit in Kent, at which spot he was cocksure that a German army would presently emerge into the darkness of the English night. Investigations proved that his fears were chimerical, and there the matter ended.

In May, 1913, on the occasion of the visit of King George and Queen Mary to Berlin, the then German Kaiser, as an act of grace—though it fell rather short of that—gave the " spies " their freedom at a period, be it remarked, when any secret information they might have obtained had become totally worthless ; but not before the episode in question had cost the German Exchequer a pretty *pfennig* in the way of structural " alterations."

The foregoing facts, however, are drifting into the region of ancient history ; what few know, and what in my opinion all of us ought to know and remember about the affair is just one point, which is this : at the trial of the two young Britons at Leipzig it was seriously demanded by the prosecution that, lest at any time afterwards they should divulge in London the knowledge they had acquired, the offenders *should be deprived of their reason.*

But there ! I had no intention of entering into a moral treatise when I began to recall certain past events. I introduced East Friesland and its possibilities of defence or attack because during the thick of hostilities in France and Flanders I was sent thither to make fresh investigations—this time, ashore. Perhaps not without due grounds, East Friesland for some considerable time suffered a holy horror of British invasion. Stories of the inactivity and ineptitude of the British Fleet were not swallowed by the Frieslanders, the seafaring portion of their population knowing

much better than the stay-at-home non-combatant grousing Briton—who at the time vapoured about our Navy's " quietness "—the almost daily and nightly events which happened outside the screen of low-tide sand-stretches and the islands beyond, and up in the Heligoland Bight not so very far away. Spy mania in East Friesland was for long acute and rampant. Already several earnest seekers after naval and military truth—two men of my own nationality, a French Naval Intelligence officer, and two Russians—had failed to " write home " for such an unconscionable period that they themselves had been written off as captured and probably dead ; and Allied Intelligence let things slide, or simmer, for a while.

Then, from certain neutral sources, trickled through the news that, owing to prolonged immunity from direct attack and to the ever-increasing demands and dispersion of German personnel, certain parts of East Friesland offered themselves as possible territory for secret investigation at the hands of the right man ; and having, I suppose, a claim to the title, to East Friesland I was circuitously despatched, with open instructions to scan and report upon what I could discover in that territory, and particularly the stretch of it which lay between the Ems-Jade Canal and the sand-locked coastline.

The very openness of my instructions, the necessity for constant movement, and the wide extent of the land to be covered, all combined to render my mission

extremely baffling and difficult to plan. Indeed, at last, having been successfully smuggled into Emden (of all places !) I perforce had to lay up a week there in the abode of a friend, where I spent most of my time scratching his wits as well as my own for a workable notion of how I should get along with the job.

But what rôle was I to assume ? That was the teaser. On this occasion I had been provided with no papers at all—it couldn't be done ; and the difficulties and the risks in front of me were so great, I confess, that once or twice I felt like chucking up the sponge and making tracks, which, as things were, would have been suicidal ; further than this, my host had got scared, since on two occasions late at night the police on a general round-up for "strangers" —otherwise spies—had hammered at our side door, flush with the door of the shop, resolved on searching the premises, wherein my friend and landlord, an elderly Jew, had dwelt religiously alone for nearly thirty years.

Fortunately for me the old man was able to bamboozle them off. And there was this to be considered : on this trip I hadn't really the ghost of a chance of stepping safely out of Prussian territory until the expiry of at least six weeks, when the route by which I had come would again be open to me, and not before. Should I miss that opportunity, it meant good-bye for ever to dear old England and everywhere else.

"Who Goes There ?"

They say that everything comes to him who waits, and I had always been an active doubter of the adage until something happened in this architecturally Dutch town of Emden that made me modify my doubt.

An evening with a sky of dirty silver was rapidly deepening into darkness and I was "at home," sitting at an attic window above the old Jew's junk-shop, peeping down into the narrow squalid unlighted street beneath, a mere cul-de-sac which had its birth in another squalid street. Goodness knows that never anything happened worth witnessing in the blind alley; but for a wonder this particular evening, on the opposite pavement, something quite startling occurred—relatively speaking, of course; for isn't everything merely relative in this tremendous yet tiny world of ours?

There was a small "doss-house" over the way almost facing my own wretched hiding-hole, and my glance had been suddenly drawn there by a commotion within it. I saw the door jerked open, and on the instant out shot an old pedlar-man with arms outstretched.

No slight force must have been exerted behind him, for in the twinkling of an eye there he sprawled, a good eight feet from the doorstep, in the middle of the narrow gully, where he lay face downward, his pedlar's pack riding his neck lopsidedly.

The door of the house had been quickly slammed to, and, so far as I could make out, the perpetrator or

perpetrators of the cowardly assault were no further concerned about their victim.

Well, there the poor old chap lay, so long without making the slightest movement that I knew he was badly hurt or at any rate quite knocked out.

I suppose I had watched the spread-eagled form for three minutes or so, and the pedlar still lay there just as he had fallen—and for that matter, if any pedestrian other than a policeman had observed the plight of the old fellow he would have passed on, so afraid are the grown-up children of Teut about being mixed up in any " street affair "—when I proceeded to do a rather rash thing.

I hastened downstairs from my attic (my host was out, " having one " at Heeren's Hotel by the station, I suspected—a joy from which I was strictly debarred,) and cautiously opened the front door, peered to right and left, noticed that the blinds of all the windows opposite were drawn in obeyance to the regulations ; and observing no sign of a potential witness of what I was about to do, I stepped outside and bent over the still prone figure—after furtively scanning the windows on my own side of the street. They, too, were blinded, and I was pretty sure that I was unobserved.

I gently turned the man over on his back, and at the same time the look of him, the feel of him, assured me that he was beyond my ministrations, or those of any human. The only thing that remained for me to do, therefore—and that must be without delay—was

to get back into my den as unobtrusively as I had left it.

But as I reached the doorstep a thought struck me. Again I looked to right and left in the growing gloom and up at the windows—and saw no one, heard no one. And the rash thing that I did was to cross to the middle of the street again, lay hold of the inanimate body—I doubt if it weighed more than eight and a half stone—and half carry, half drag it and the pack across the road and into my own doorway, where in no time I had the door shut upon us both in the hall or passage, and my burden deposited midway between the front and back door at the end of the passage.

I recollect the time when I could not have done such a thing for a pension ; but that was before the War. There was a candle standing on a bracket. I lit it, and not for the first time did I notice the " subject "—so typically German and now so appropriate !—on the faded wall-paper : a band of almost life-sized, corpulent angels (one with whiskers !) in flight, and each blowing a trumpet as long as a coach horn.

I bent down and had a look at the man's face ; and a very ordinary German face I judged it to be under the short-worn, dirty white beard and moustache ; but his eyes were unusual for a North German—almost black. My own are very dark brown.

Dead men tell no tales, and it is just as certain that

no dead man will protest at the turning out of his pockets. I took that liberty, certainly with no view of enriching myself in the matter of money (exactly fifty pfennigs was all the cash upon the corpse), but with the, to me, justifiable intention of purloining his identification " brief," for which he had no further use in this world, and I no means of posting it on to him in the next.

It seemed that in life he had been plain Wilhelm Braun, and that his age was sixty-three. Among the closely-written mass of details concerning his humble person I noticed, by the way, that his father (deceased) had been a landed proprietor, for he was described as a " Mr. Great-Estate-Proprietor Johann Braun."

I was just congratulating myself upon my good, if gruesome, luck, and had thrust the precious document into my pocket when a sound made me shoot out a hand and extinguish the candle between my finger and thumb.

Someone was opening the street door.

It gave me a bad quarter of a minute, for, had that someone worn a " helmet," as I fully expected, my position in the passage made it impossible for me to escape upstairs to my attic—where there was a cunning hiding-place among the rafters—without being seen, or at least heard. The very fact that I should wish to escape notice would be fatal; and it was with an actual gulp of relief that I discerned, when the door was pushed open, not a police-helmet but the

unmistakable outline of a wide-brimmed hat I knew only too well—my landlord's.

" Who is there, eh ? " he demanded gruffly, truculent yet palpably anxious.

" Come in and lock that door," I bade him in low tones. He did so, upbraiding me the while in mutterings for being so foolish as to risk coming downstairs until he himself fetched me.

" Ach ! " he concluded, as he pushed home the bolts and turned to me in the darkness. " I thought it was the Polizei, a surprise visit while I was out. That is a famous dodge of theirs—even with their friends."

I relit the candle while he was speaking, and now I held it up, pointing to the dead pedlar, whom I had laid close alongside the wall, with his hands crossed upon his breast.

My friend drew back hastily, then reverently snatched off his hat. Happily he was not of the numerous tribe of *Kohenin*, who are forbidden to look upon a corpse ; and after a moment's natural hesitation he knelt down beside the body.

While holding the candle so that he could see better, I quietly explained how the body came to be there, my motive in bringing it there ; and my Jewish friend rose presently from his knees and remarked that my notion certainly seemed to offer a solution of my difficulties.

" But," he whispered, wagging his curly beard,

which seemed to have been adjusted under his chin after the fashion of a baby's bib, " there is a great risk, my worthy one, a great risk. You are certain no one saw you drag him in ? No ? Good ! Whether anyone did or not I do not care a trouser button. I could get over the police about that. Yes ; they would take my word for it, for I am the only one in the street they would believe—yes, upon my sacred life it is true.

" Am not I here in my shop, my worthy one, during twenty-seven year, and buy their left-off clothing ? Am not I the man they come to for twenty marks or so when the Frau is in the confinement and cries for extravagant nourishment ?

" But there is too much risk, my worthy one, too much risk, and I say unto you it cannot be done."

I knew what was coming, naturally ; but before he approached the question of an additional fee for the disposal of the body he waxed so elongatedly eloquent about Prussian Law on the subject of dead bodies found in the street ; on harbouring corpses ; and about the eventual certainty of his having to stand his trial for murder, and of my being charged as an accomplice, that I lost patience and asked him to name a sum outright.

He did so with dour determination, and a pretty stiff amount it was, too ; but even if it had to come out of my own pocket I should have agreed to pay ; and right glad was I when we both said " Topp " (agreed) and shook hands over the unpleasant transaction.

Concerned as I was about the last resting-place of the pedlar, the old man was reticent as a *ghebre* on the point. The only hand he would allow me to take in the business was the preliminary one of helping him to carry the body out into the pitch-dark back-yard of his premises. There, in a shed which housed his motor-van, and after we had shut the doors behind us and I had relighted the solitary candle, we stowed away the limp corpse in a corner and covered it with sacking. " Sleep well, my poor unfortunate one," said the Jew with perfect sincerity, and again removing his hat. " I will come and see you early in the morning, my dear."

Then, after relocking the shed, we crept back into the house, where, in the back parlour, over cups of strong coffee, we talked about the turn of events far into the night, and at last we evolved a possible plan.

The old pedlar, so the Jew informed me, owing to his frail physique and one short leg—he wore an iron under one boot—had seldom been known to travel beyond the ancient ramparts of the town. He was much addicted to drink, and had on several occasions been fished out of one canal or another—and, heaven knows, Emden has a proper network of canals—more dead than alive. Moreover, now that the question of the additional monetary reward had been settled, the Jew began to declare that we ran hardly any risk at all; that Wilhelm Braun would never be enquired after, and if he were—well, no one would

trouble much about his total disappearance from the streets and cafés, where he had been looked upon by police and public as a persistent nuisance.

Next morning at six o'clock my Jewish host brought a cup of coffee to my bedside—a little attention that he bestowed upon me every morning at the same early hour. An admirable fellow-conspirator, he had spent several hours of the night in getting ready for me an excellent if disreputable rig-out, even down to the pedlar's iron, which my friend had cleverly screwed to one of my own stout " workman's " boots.

When I had drunk my coffee I proceeded at once to dress for the part I had to play, and the Jew's outfit proving satisfactory, it only remained to " doctor " my face and to whiten my hair and the stubbly beard, whiskers and moustache which I had already regrown against necessity such as this. Except on the stage, artificial hair is worse then useless as a disguise ; for the rest—I'm not giving any secrets away. You may take it that if I wasn't the exact replica of the dead pedlar, my outward details, at all events, offered reasonable likeness to those listed in his identification " brief." Moreover, if the Jew's information was true, I was going where the real pedlar had probably never been, and was therefore unknown. Yes, all things considered, I was satisfied, and more especially since the Jew's experienced and searching eye passed me.

" You will do, my worthy one," he remarked solemnly, after walking round and round me a dozen

times, as if he had just fitted me with an expensive ready-made. " No policeman need look at you twice ; but I do not envy you the iron foot. Now, you shall practise it a little up here while I go to the Polizei for a pass for a little business trip into the country ; then we eat a little breakfast together as usual ; and then you say good-bye to Emden, eh ? " He paused at the door, gave me one last critical survey, bade me smilingly to make no " stumpings," then left me.

When the Jew had gone, instead of practising my ironed foot (if I had done so then, I believe I should have chucked up the part), I had another look at the dead man's pack. The contents suggested that it had quite recently been restocked, and this perhaps accounted for the small sum of money I found upon him. It was pretty heavy, too, and as I fixed it upon my shoulders I knew that I was in for many a weary groan during my pilgrimage in the East Friesland fastnesses, not to mention growing callosities on my shoulder-blades in double-quick time.

And what an assortment the thing contained: there were boot-laces, collar-studs, sleeve-links, bachelors'-buttons, pipe-cleaners, quack pills of doubtful origin and effect, and a mass of heterogeneous trifles too numerous to detail. Besides these—as I found out later—hidden within a false bottom of the pack I had been bequeathed a series of photographs, of such a nature that in London their mere possession might have brought me into conflict with the Obscene

Publications Department at Scotland Yard. May I be forgiven ! but there in Deutschland I knew their value toward facilitating and establishing friendships. But it was the boot-iron that got my goat. Nothing can convey to you the acute discomfort, the spells of cramp I had to suffer from its adoption. I simply couldn't get accustomed to the beastly thing ; and, believe me, for weeks after the ecstatic moment when I eventually hurled it with boisterous and joyful maledictions from the boat-deck of a Swedish " tramp " into the depths of the North Sea, I walked with one knee crooked ; and if I didn't, I thought I did, for its glutinous ghost still stuck to the sole of my foot. May I make a present of the fact to the moralists ?

It was now nearly nine o'clock when my host manœuvred his Ford van close up to the yard-door of the house itself so that I could climb in without being seen by anyone who possibly might be prying. The Jew had got his police-pass—he often peddled a little on his own account in the country beyond the town—and this morning the van was packed with all sorts of junk : ancient iron bedsteads, old mattresses, a collection of crockery-ware, and what not. But he had left space for me, and when into that space I had wriggled, pack and all, he built me in so handily that I felt sure I was not the first piece of contraband, human or otherwise, that he had smuggled past the barriers of authority.

It pleased my friend to be facetious, for just before

he completely blocked out my view, he said, chuckling : " I am sorry you could not attend your brother's funeral, my worthy one. But the interment had to take place very early this morning. You may be glad to hear that I was the only mourner." With that pronouncement he slammed the van doors and bolted them.

Our first stop was at a railway-crossing just outside the town, where the Jew was held up to produce his pass by a military guard ; and here, from the interior of the van I overheard a phrase that made me shiver like a furnace-man suddenly exposed to a wintry nor'-easter.

" I believe that you have an English spion concealed in your van, Herr Kauffmann," said a stentorian voice.

Then came the voice of the Jew. " Ja, ja," he laughed, " I have ten dirty English spions in my van, and I am going to drown them all in the Lakes."

And so it went on. Badinage on both sides, of course ; but I didn't realise it until I heard the soldiers break into loud guffaws at the Jew's retorts. He scored off them every time, and we were soon permitted to proceed on our way amid a chorus of " Good-mornings " and " Adieus." And, ancient and decrepit-looking as the van was, she was presently doing a good thirty miles an hour without making any fuss about it.

All the same, I was not at all sorry when my driver next applied his brakes to pull up, for I ached horribly

from my cramped quarters, and I longed to breathe air that was free from the taint of mildewed mattresses.

This time the Jew dismounted, came round to the back of the van, and having unfastened the doors, bade me step out into the good God's sunshine ; for I had arrived at my journey's end, so far as the Ford van was implicated.

I found myself in a remote and lonely spot ; if I remember aright we had overshot the little village of Georgshiel by several miles ; anyway, where we stood—two " characters " if you like !—we were well out of sight of any sort of habitation. The only living thing that we observed (and the Jew vowed it an omen of good luck) was a solitary crow overhead plodding his unswervingly straight flight northward over the wide moors.

We wasted no time in palaver, and after reassuring me that he would not fail to despatch replenishments for my pack to the places already arranged between us, my friend turned the nose of the old Ford westward, and I was left to make sole use of Shanks' mare, and a lame one at that.

Between ourselves I am not over-fond of any nationality other than my own, but I'll say this for the Jews : they are staunch to their friends, be those friends Jewish or Gentile. My acquaintance with the Hebrew junk dealer had been short, but we had grown to like one another ; and if he had ever and always an

eye to the main chance, the Lord knows I didn't begrudge him a pfennig he got through me, realising as I did, and he did, that for harbouring me on his premises even for one minute he ran the risk of certain death. Nor do I think he took that risk for gain simply. About himself " Herr Kauffmann " was as close as a clam, but from his occasional utterances I deduced that he really loathed the Prussians : and if any man declares hatred to be one of the seven deadly sins, I say that I will believe in no man incapable of honest, well-merited hate ; for he who hates not, loves not, and is of that emasculated type which brings forth " conchies," cowards, and nondescripts.

Well, here I was, left to my own devices in the middle of East Friesland, with three alternatives, if you'll forgive the misnomer. First : by walking a few miles I could get on the railway to Norden—a useful jumping-off place for costal investigation. Second : I could work along the Ems-Jade Canal towards Wilhelmshaven—with perhaps the chance of getting a lift and a rest for my iron-shod foot upon a barge going in that direction ; or, third : I could strike northward on foot across the desolate twelve-mile stretch of moors to the rail-track which feeds the more fertile and more populous area near the sea.

The way across the moors I declined forthwith, mainly because there was no hope of a lift on that journey. About the Ems-Jade Canal we already knew

as much as sufficed ; and in the vicinity of Wilhelmshaven I had been instructed that we had a reliable agent planted.

It was, then, Norden way for me ; nevertheless, I hobbled on painfully eastward as far as Aurich, partly because the rather pretty little town stood at the junction of canal and railway, and I wanted to have a look at it, and partly because it seemed wise to give the impression to whomsoever I met that, having plied my trade thither on foot, my return by train was a quite natural proceeding.

Of the necessity of a preliminary practice with my confounded boot-iron I'll say nothing, except that it proved a painful exception to the rule which says practice makes perfect, and made me curse the worst of all curses—those that are born in the heart and die on the lips. At length, then, I boarded a passenger train—made up of cattle and coal trucks !—at Aurich, which finally dumped me down at Norden, together with a few uninquisitive taciturn farmers, at about half-past three in the afternoon.

So little attention had been paid to me that I began to gain confidence in my disguise. No one, now or hereafter, asked to see my papers, and I believe that I needn't have bothered even to report myself to the Norden police in accordance with the regulations then in force ; though, of course, I dared not omit to do so. As a matter of fact, the station officer's main desire seemed to be to get rid of my presence as quickly

as possible ; and you may be certain that I didn't test my good fortune by lingering to press upon him trifles from my pedlar's pack.

Of my secret activities I shall say nothing here ; as a pedlar certainly I was a success. Beginning work (in its two-fold meaning) at Norden, for upward of a month I worked eastward, assiduous as any German bagman, the while employing eyes as keen as a weasel's ; and soon, becoming positive that the real Wilhelm Braun was totally unknown, I began to grow a character of my own that everywhere disarmed suspicion. Surely so ridiculous a creature, maimed in mind as well as in limb, was the last human object on earth to be suspected as a spy. Yes, I'll wager that if you were to enquire in any one of the little towns, villages, or at isolated farms along that northern strip of East Friesland, as far east as Jever itself, you would find many a man and many a housewife who could recall the hobbling pedlar, half-witted, except in the matter of money or until pink gin and yellow beer unleashed his tongue for the telling of the funniest stories that ever made a countryman grip his sides with laughter, go home and not tell his good wife.

I slept wheresoever I could ; if there was an available common lodging-house I patronised Schlafzimmer and Küche ; if not, I bought or—not without difficulty—cadged my food ; and many a night I slept beneath the sympathetic stars, sometimes in barns invariably rat-infested, sometimes in an idle or laid-up

barge, and once or twice beneath an upturned row-boat.

And that brings me to the final incident, which is the real reason for my telling of this East Friesland experience.

I had reached and crossed several miles beyond the railway branching north to the coast from Jever junction. The fertile lands had given place to barren sandy waste, tufted with marram grass, which stitches the sand together much as a tailor first stitches together the pieces of a garment. The low dunes trailed dismally north and east to indistinct edgings which I supposed to be sea-dykes. I often wished I could have carried small binoculars in my pack, but that dangerous luxury was denied me. Beyond the dykes, again, was an indeterminate opacity which might have been dead-calm sea or fog. I had met no one, seen no one, for several hours past.

My road—such as it was—had gradually petered out into a mere apology for one, and I was on the point of saying " Finish ! " and turning back, lest I should be benighted and befogged, when it suddenly struck me that the sandy track showed evidence of bearing someone to and from a definite somewhere, plentifully rutted as it was by wheels—recent wheels, and thin ones at that.

The fact puzzled me not a little, since it appeared to be a road to Nowhere. I could see no sign of life at all.

The land all around me lay desolate as a desert, not flat—few deserts are level, contrary to popular imagination—but rolling and hummocky.

For all I knew, the track might simply have strung itself out round the coast to Wilhelmshaven, a town which, as I have said, I did not intend to include in my itinerary. Notwithstanding, I made up my mind to follow it for a bit, fagged as I was ; and after doing another half-mile or so in the twilight I came upon something which puzzled me completely.

The wheel-ruts and hoof-marks ended in a little " circus," beyond which the sandy track itself did not continue. I turned back in disgust, and almost immediately espied something which I had blindly passed by. There, in a depression about two hundred yards distant and lying a good fifty yards to the right or seaward side of the track, I observed a most uncommon looking structure—if it were a structure. I don't know what it suggested, unless it were a neglected hay-rick which had sagged badly at one or two places. Its rounded irregularities of roof were cunningly daubed sand-yellow and apple-green, and had it not been for the unmistakable outline of a door and a half-shuttered window close to it, even now I might have been deceived by the camouflage, might have suspected nothing except that the thing was merely a forlorn tump of sand " patched " with marram grass aforesaid, and have passed it by blindly as before.

Though I could detect no sign of a living creature

about the erection—which I quickly labelled galvanised iron—I thought it wise promptly to fall on my hands and knees and crawl away into another depression, there to lie low until the daylight had completely disappeared.

Here in this more than desolate waste, within a rifle-shot of the Jade Estuary—the sea highway to Wilhelmshaven !—had been carefully erected a mysterious building, which was being frequently visited, unless the wheel-tracks lied. There was no suspicion of a sentry, no barbed wire enclosure, no line of telephone poles ; obviously any one of these would have rendered the camouflaging abortive ; that is to say, such things would have been spotted by seaplanes or by aeroplanes.

Who, then, in the name of Allah, visited this extraordinary isolated structure ; for what object had it been erected ? Both questions I had to solve as soon as possible ; but, since someone even now might be in occupation, and since I thought it probable that " relief," as they say at sea, might take place after dark, I meanwhile settled myself down in a rush-fringed cup-like hole and speculated upon my discovery over a hunk of bread and goose fat—the best fare I could procure that day—hoping the fog would obligingly steal inland from the sea before nightfall.

The fog, indeed, after the manner of fine-weather sea-fogs, took me insidiously unawares ; for when at last in the gathering dusk I ventured to crawl out from my hiding-place for a preliminary look-see, prior to a

thorough reconnoitre, I found I could see nothing beyond a circle of a few yards' radius.

Having tugged off my boots, I managed to strike the track I had left without difficulty—if I omit sprawling on my face at about the second step, owing chiefly to the boot-iron's unaccustomed absence. Stepping along in my stockinged feet cautiously as a cat after a sparrow, I came abreast of the erection. Not a trace of light could I discern ; not a sound could I hear ; the place seemed dead. But far from satisfied, I made a detour and crept up to the structure from the seaward side.

Although the sand lay right up against the building my feet told me that close beneath the surface lay a more solid substance, and on scraping away a thin layer of sand I discovered concrete which, I should imagine, ran all the way round in a ledge about two feet wide—obviously an extension of the foundations. The mystery deepened and I gently placed my ear against the flat iron wall of the place, now dripping wet from the fog.

Closer inspection, by the way, had shown me that the irregularities of the building were largely a very clever pictorial fake. The roof, certainly, was domed, with its edges or eaves rounded at different elevations ; but the walls were set square, and enclosed about as much room as a British Army hut, or a garage for two large cars standing end on.

As I learnt later, the walls were lined with wood and

a material like felt—I fancy there was asbestos in it.

I was puzzled; I was excited inwardly; and I stood there hearing no sound in the eerie stillness, unless it were (that faintest of sounds) the whispering of sand particles surrounding me and, once, the squeaky note of a bird—probably an owl—flying high above the fog.

I was considering the risk of creeping round to the door and the window when the distant but unmistakable purring of a motor-car brought me to attention and made me prick up my ears. Undoubtedly someone within the hitherto silent hut had heard it too, for a chair rasped along the floor and heavy footsteps scraped towards the door, which opened with a jerky metallic cracking and a whine.

At once I edged round to the eastward side of the hut and listened for all I was worth. From where I stood, concealed by an angle, I could see the wall of mist in front of me whitened a little by the sidelong dispersion of light from the open door, and I heard a deep voice mutter a few words, which I could not catch, but no doubt in reference to the fog.

The car, I judged, had not gone on as far as the "circus," for it switched off suddenly, to my right.

"Is that you, Otto?" sang out the man from the door of the hut.

"Who else do you expect?" replied a high-pitched querulous voice. "The damned Englanders?" He added too a phrase (unprintable) about the fog.

" All right—all right, mein lieber," rejoined the man at the door heartily. " Keep your temper for the coffee-watch " (and by that I knew the speaker for a sailor). " Anyway, I'm glad you've had the courage to disobey orders and bring an automobile. Safe enough in this blanket. I'm tired myself of the old farmer's gig. Still, fog or no fog, you'd better drive to the usual place before you turn—well, you know the rules— — " he broke off.

" The car stays where he is ! " snarled the other. " No one will walk into it or off with it in this Dead-Man's Land."

" All right—all right," repeated the hearty voice. " Herr Jesus ! You get more surly every day. Still, hurry up and come along in. The beer's not run out yet, and I've been feeling accursedly lonely."

Footsteps were scrunching sand ; the whitened patch of fog ahead of me narrowed into a thin line, then disappeared into dusky grey as the door of the hut cried on its hinges and banged to.

So there were two of them—and two only !

I slipped round my sheltering angle past the door to the window. Nothing doing there ! Both wings of the heavy overlapping iron shutters were now shut fast ; there wasn't a crevice or a crack from which light escaped from window or door anywhere ; and I dared fiddle with neither. You know how galvanised iron responds to the slightest touch, is apt to crackle and complain, even when it's reinforced ?

Still as a statue, I stood near the window, listening and holding my breath ; I heard the muffled murmur of voices, so faint that I could not distinguish a syllable ; so there was nothing for it but to slip back again to my hiding-place round the corner and await events, which I hoped would not be long in coming, because my feet had grown cold as the concrete under them.

Five minutes—ten minutes—I don't know . . . at last the door opened again and someone stepped outside. I got the whiff of a cigar, a good one—wonderful how sociable and prosperous a good cigar smells !

" Thick as the devil's Sunday overcoat ! " exclaimed the hearty voice, as its owner moved away. " Anyway, it's better than being aboard an infernal kriegschiff " (warship).

" Your sort could make merry in hell," growled his companion after him, from inside the doorway. " Nice shore-leave I call it, to be buried alive in a sand-hole like this place ! "

" Wait till the War is over in the year two thousand and one ! Then we'll have a look at Hamburg—St. Pauli for preference." The hearty voice became fainter. " Here is one for watch-below under a ton of goose feathers—if I can find the car. Keep a bright look-out for nothing, as usual, old bird ; and don't forget to ring up Wilhelmshaven if the English Fleet pokes its snout into the estuary. Ha, ha ! What a blessed

life ! " He began to sing, so boisterously that I caught the words, which in English run :

" I know a little maiden who lives inside a mill ;
And how I used to love her : I think I love her still.
But O, she had a mother, whose face was sour as whey,
And thinking she'd grow like her, I said good-bye for aye."

Then, " All right " the cheery voice rang out in the distance. " I've made a perfect landfall—all by dead-reckoning, and no soundings taken. I shall claim pilotage money from our Admiralty. Gute Nacht ! "

I heard the sound of cranking, then the reverberating roar of the engine, which was quickly throttled down ; the car " backed and filled, " and finally set off slowly on its return journey. Presently the whirr of the engine was smothered by the fog, and there came the dead silence of the dunes again.

" Mathilde !—Mathilde ! "

The low-pitched astounding call was so close to me that I sprang backward ; my shoulders slithered against the wall ; I slipped and fell.

The man had come quietly round my corner ; against the grey I saw his silhouette etched clearly—a short, slim man in a coat that reached nearly to his ankles. To this day I'm not sure if he saw me, but he came directly toward me. I scrambled cautiously on to one knee.

" Mathilde ! " he repeated louder, " what are you playing at ? "

Then I grabbed at his ankles, got them, gripped them in a vice, and as he, uttering a sharp curse, bent to seize me, I surged up beneath him and, with all the strength I had, shot him headlong over my shoulders as I heaved myself upright.

The poor devil fell crack on his skull on the concrete. The sound was enough. I didn't strike a match. Of course he'd have killed me without giving me a dog's chance, but I own I felt a trifle sick as I bent over him ; for there was no mistaking the fact—his neck was broken. . . . Well, war is war—and beastly enough, whichever way you look at it. . . .

Assured that he, at all events, was out of the game, I darted round to the open door, which opened outward, snatched at the handle and edged inside the hut, closing the door as I entered.

The interior was—shall I say?—bizarre as the exterior. At one end I saw a cupboard and, close by, a plain deal round table upon which stood lidded mugs for beer, and little glasses for spirits, a carafe of water, a bottle of whiskey with a familiar Scotch label upon it !—and a small electric cooking apparatus. An electric globe hung from the roof. Dubious photographs of women and illustrations from vulgar periodicals were tacked against the walls. On my right, standing on four legs, was a curious elongated box, like a sideboard and about the same height as one. Its top, or lid, brightly varnished, was studded with an array of brass knobs arranged in line—like the white

keys of a pianoforte, one might say ; and behind each brass knob was a white disc of xylonite bearing a number in black figures. Near this switchboard—for such, obviously, it was—stood a swivel office chair and, again, a small pedestal table upon which rested a telephone receiver with double head-piece.

Above the switch-box, flat against the end wall, hung an extensive large-scale chart embracing the bending shore line and the Jade Estuary from Wilhelmshaven right out to sea beyond Wangeroog Island ; and upon the chart were plotted nests of small red numbered circles, some of which were joined by ruled lines to what I took to be the hut in which I—and " Mathilde "—stood. There were, I think, four easy chairs about the place, and an electric heating stove.

But these details and my conjectures about them came later ; at first my whole attention had been riveted upon Mathilde.

Enveloped in a dark brown motor-cloak with the hood flung back, the woman, her age, I should say, about thirty-five, stood beneath the electric globe, eyeing me steadfastly, and with no trace of alarm.

Junoesque—that's about the term for her. A splendid figure of a woman, her left hand, long and beautifully shaped, rested upon her hip, her right being hidden in her pocket. She'd a face cut clear as an intaglio ; the nose, perhaps, a trifle too prominent, the eyebrows a shade too close together. She had violet eyes and a complexion of an olive warmth that

bespoke no German origin ; blue-black, naturally (I saw that at a glance) wavy hair that no barber, man or maid, would have " bobbed " without a pang ; and a rich, low voice which fascinated me the moment I heard it. Well, pardon the details, but there in that hut in the wilderness her striking appearance almost took my breath away.

And in a world where outward appearances count for so much (a world which little suspects, say, that the common crow is first cousin to the gorgeous bird of paradise) perhaps it wasn't altogether strange that, conscious suddenly of the drably grotesque figure I cut, I felt a perfect top-hole ass.

But that wasn't all. I knew that she'd no more right to be there than I had ; and from the moment I heard her name called into the fog I'd realised that sooner or later I must encounter and deal with Mathilde. That itself had offered a problem ; and now, lo and behold ! there I stood confronting it. Nor did I need telling that she held a weapon in her right side-pocket, though I can't say I trembled on that account. Still, I had to remember my sudden apparition there, and to assume that she viewed it with more than suspicion. Soon she let me see that she knew far too much about myself for my liking, and the way her downward glance struck at my stockinged feet didn't make me any the happier. On the contrary, I knew that in not taking to my heels when I had the chance I had let myself into the most devilishly tight corner I'd ever been in.

But Mathilde wasn't giving me much time for thought just then—five seconds at the most, after I had closed the door, then swung round, to find myself gaping at her like a yokel at a " principal boy " in pantomime.

" You are the pedlar-man," she began, in a business-like tone which I didn't like at all, " the pedlar-man who hobbles from village to village, selling things, joking, and making the numskulls laugh "—and I was just framing a saucy reply in keeping with my " half-witted " reputation when she added something I liked still less.

" For a cripple and an old man," said she, " you are rather powerful as well as nimble, are you not ? "

She gave me plenty of time to answer ; but I stuck to my rôle, with my mouth half-open and my eyes peering slyly into hers, as if I hadn't quite taken in what she said.

" You see," she continued in a level strain that had no trace of feeling, let alone emotion, in it—" you see, I also was there waiting outside the hut. . . . I saw you kill the naval officer."

Now, what could I answer to that ? Like the mythical Barney's bull I was in a cinch and I saw no way out—short of violence, that I simply couldn't contemplate. But I had learnt something already. . . . You recollect what Charnay said about Intelligence work sharpening the senses to a terrier's keenness ? Well, unless this woman were acting consummately, although she had witnessed my killing of her

companion I felt convinced that the deed itself had left her quite unmoved. The fact held out some sort of encouragement.

All the same, I was by no means happy about that hidden right hand of hers, and again I remained mute and " stupid," remembering that in an awkward corner a well-timed silence may work like yeast in one's opponent, and bring a profitable froth of words to the surface.

Profitable! Froth! My sainted Sam! her next words fairly gave me the shivers; not because of the shade of anger in her eyes and voice, inspired, I fancy, more by my obstinate silence than anything else; but because—well, judge for yourself.

" What brings you into these parts ? " she demanded. " You did not come here to rob. Why do you assume the character of a pedlar and incommode yourself with an iron boot you do not need ? And you are not an old man. Oblige me by speaking."

Oblige her! Why, as sure as I stood there I knew, and I know it as surely now, that it was a case of answer or a bullet, and I dissembled no further.

" Gnädige Frau," I said, striving to match the quality of her speech and manner, " you observe with much shrewdness, but that faculty alone should tell you that it is not easy for me to reply to your questions, after the regrettable accident you witnessed——"

She stopped me with her left hand uplifted, her first gesture, unhurried yet imperious. " You did not

come to rob," she repeated, "still less do I think you came to murder"—and then, like the thrust of a rapier: "You came here to spy. You are a *spion*."

Yes, it was like a thrust of a rapier; but I was prepared for it. Even as she spoke, I realised in a flash that she herself had been preparing me cleverly for the point-blank statement—for statement it was, and no indignant or fateful accusation. I realised that no German woman, having witnessed the killing of a German officer, would speak thus, behave thus to the man who had killed him, and whom, moreover, she knew to be an enemy spy: a million to one a German woman would have gone into hysterics. Here, I told myself, was no German woman, but a pure-bred Latin—or I knew nothing at all of ethnology. And whether she happened to be French, Italian, Spanish or Portuguese, I suddenly tumbled to it that if this Mathilde were not a professional "spion" she was up to "spion's" work, and therefore we were two of a trade.

I came to cues at once; for if my suppositions were wrong, the sooner I became disillusioned the better.

"You have asked me what brings me to this hut," I said, "and I will tell you, madame. May I say that my visit was suggested by a motive not much unlike your own? Is it possible that you and I are—equally curious about this mysterious hut?"

Purposely I spoke in French, and I discerned a faint softening in her steady violet eyes, and her right hand unobtrusively came out from her pocket

—empty. But, though I could see that she had understood every word, she answered me still in her flawless German, without the slightest deviation from her aloof and unemotional tone, and without admissions.

" You are not French," she stated. " Your German, on the other hand, is perfect."

" I am English," I replied. She merely nodded, and I proceeded briefly to put all my cards on the table—all.

She listened to my little recitation interestedly—that is the only word for it. But though I now felt positive she was a colleague, professional or otherwise, and that she had decided to trust me, I perceived nevertheless that she had no intention of extending that beautifully shaped right hand of hers in camaraderie. An astounding creature—she absolutely beat me ; she wasn't normal.

Still, she admitted that she was a Frenchwoman, heart and soul, though she declared that she had never set foot in her beloved France. But that was all. Not one scrap of information would she give me : she wouldn't say what motive had drawn her to the hut ; she wouldn't realise her danger ; she flatly refused my suggestions of " help." In a word, her attitude was fanatical, armour-plated it seemed against every human sentiment. And finally, in the politest way imaginable, she told me that it behoved me to make my escape at once, warned me that another German naval officer was due at the hut before daybreak, and that I

had six hours in which to get as far away from the place as I could.

Disappointing ? Rather ! But she talked horse-sense so far as I was concerned ; and I did not see the use of standing on my dignity when every minute counted. Indeed, the conviction that I'd better be going had begun to hit me pretty hard.

Mathilde followed me to the door, and when I had stepped outside and taken half a dozen stumbling paces into the fog I heard her cool impersonal voice—for the last time.

" You may count on six hours—six," she pronounced clearly ; then the iron door creaked and snapped, and I was shut out in the cotton-wool darkness. And as I paused a moment to get my bearings I recollect wondering just why she had taken the trouble to remind me of the exact number of hours that lay between me and safety.

Well, I mightn't have had that stretch of time if the fog cleared, since, pedlar or no pedlar, I'd no valid reason for trudging those parts in the small hours. By good fortune the fog held, though it helped me to fritter away a precious half-hour before I could retrieve my boots and my pack, without which I dared not have shown myself to another soul in East Friesland.

And how I cursed that relic of the Inquisition, my undetachable boot-iron ! Quite apart from the impossibility of going barefoot, I'd got so used to the iron

that I just couldn't get along at any pace for any considerable distance without it. And I had set myself to do twelve miles, in order to reach a farmstead I knew that lay well on the western side of the railroad from Jever. With the acquiescence of the farmer and his Frau I had " dossed " in their barn once before, and could I but instal myself therein unobserved, police of all sorts could go hang if they sought to connect " old dot-and-go-one " with the mysterious happenings at the hut twelve eternal miles away in the sands.

Luckily I encountered nothing on two legs; as a matter of fact, after nightfall thereabouts, and especially in a fog, the likelihood wasn't imminent. But oh, those twelve interminable miles! After the first of 'em, when the going became really rough, I hadn't a thought left for Mathilde; I could think only of my own wretched anatomy.

When at last I arrived at the farm approach, bathed in perspiration, I was a prey to a thousand aches that stabbed as one, and dead beat; almost too exhausted in body and mind to take the wise precaution of stealing a roundabout way to my resting-place, lest I should be heard or nosed by the farm Alsatian wolf-hound whose deep-toned barking I knew from experience would tear the night to tatters, did he detect me.

I made the barn safely; then came the final effort of will and sinew needed to drag myself up a ladder, until I just collapsed full-length a-top of a sweet-smelling haystack immediately beneath the barn's iron-arched roof.

I found it the most delectable resting-place in the whole wide world. Too " done " even to untie my abominable boot, aches and pains apart, I lay there in a sort of blissful drunkenness of the mind that soon meant sleep.

And then, just as I was at the point of dozing off, I found myself involuntarily and painfully sitting bolt upright, for all at once a hullabaloo began in heaven : not thunder, but muffled yet mighty boomings that I knew could be caused only by one of two things—big guns, or the explosions of mines. One after another in a prolonged and regular succession came the terrific reverberations.

From the north-east they came ; and for my part, whatever the terrified East Frieslanders might have made of the unholy racket in the Jade Estuary that night just before dawn, it needed no little blue-bird to tell me that a certain brave, if foolhardy, French-woman of my acquaintance was playing " fortissimo " upon those queer brass knobs within that camouflaged hut amid the East Friesian Sands.

And I want you to understand and appreciate one final fact.

Mathilde had told me that I might count on six hours in which to make good my escape ; and it wasn't necessary for me to peer at the dial of the cheap watch I wore ; because I knew she had given me those six hours—every single minute of them.

CHAPTER V

CONCERNING THE SUM OF TWO THOUSAND POUNDS

THERE are casuists, I suppose, who may whole-heartedly condemn the morality of one of the incidents in the episode I am going to relate ; on the other hand, more generous-minded people will, I feel sure, close their eyes to the "crime" when they learn how it brought happiness to, and sweetened, the last few remaining years of life which the War grudgingly left to one ex-army padre.

Whether or not his Bishop was an accessory before or after the crime had reared its innocent head concretely and unsuspectedly into the full light of day we can leave *to* the Bishop ; but it is safe to say that it would take the whole Bench of Bishops, assisted by goodness knows what authority, to undo what is now an accomplished edifice.

The crime I speak of had its real origin, so far as I was concerned, in Berlin, where, closely following my mission to East Friesland, I thought it wise to earn my livelihood as a waiter in one of the best-known hotels, the name of which perhaps I had better not give ; nor

may I explain how I got the job, beyond stating that Germany at the time was hiring a large amount of labour from the Netherlands, and that with a big mob of other Dutch seekers after well-paid work I managed to float across the frontier, much as a midge might be swept along by the stream of a culvert from one side of the road to the other.

From specified labour in a " War " factory to menial work in a central Berlin hotel may seem a long march ; actually it entailed but a few paces, and I propose to let it go at that, and get on with my tale.

Accredited Hollander that I now was, and after I'd been at my new job for eight days, I received by the early morning post a letter from an aunt of mine residing somewhere in the Netherlands. The envelope bore the postmark " Hertogenbosch," and the usual signs of official scrutiny, but its harmlessness was obvious ; indeed, I showed it to the Herr Ober, a potato-nosed old Austrian named Wolff, who was always mightily pleased to be made the recipient of a confidence of any description. Translated freely from its illiteracy, the epistle ran thus :

" Dear Nephew,

" It pleased me to hear that you have at last got work which brings you in better wages than the factory did. I am sure you will not forget the money I have lent to you, and hope you will pay it back soon. Germany, truly, is a wonderful nation, and as you

always say, she will certainly be victorious. But, dear nephew, big cities are full of temptations, and I entreat you to keep out of the wicked streets and the bad houses of amusement in your leisure time. I also earnestly beg of you not to forget the religious part of your life. Though they do say that the interiors of the Berlin churches are smothered in dust from want of worshippers, yet do not neglect to attend one service each week. And ever, dear nephew, seek Truth, which some say can be found in the most unexpected places, though an old woman like me can find all she wants in the Bible. And be sure you do not forget to send me the money, dear nephew; it is two hundred marks, without interest.

" Your doting aunt,
" WILHELMINA."

Well, I didn't send Aunt Wilhelmina her ten pounds, because, with the British Treasury behind her, this " official " aunt of mine wasn't short of ten millions, let alone a " tenner " ; but taking heed of her advice to seek Truth in unexpected places, I contrived to get round the Herr Ober (with an explanation full of knowing winks, not to mention a bribe) for an " unofficial " afternoon off, and dressed in my sober black Sunday suit, I went to see Khooni Dai.

Now, to understand Khooni Dai's presence and fashionable popularity in Berlin you must bear in mind that for many years before the War Kaiser

Wilhelm II had been posing as the champion of Oriental peoples and their religions. Among other episodes you may recall the blatant vulgarity of his entry into Jerusalem. Given half a chance, Wilhelm would have proclaimed himself Mahomet II, or Zoroaster II, or the Grandest Grand Lama, or anything titular that might be expected to curry favour and awe for him in the East and possibly create trouble for Britain.

The game might have been dangerous if it hadn't been so preposterous—to all the world except the Teuton. Even the Orient, which at its merriest doesn't laugh much, had to check an expansion of its enigmatic smile; for, among other things, the Oriental hadn't forgotten Attila and his Huns at the time of the Boxer rebellion in China. Russia, of course, is the only Western nation who really understands the mentality of the East; but then, Russia herself was and is cradled in the Orient, notwithstanding the European "window" built by Tsar Peter the Great, that was once called Petersburg. Witness, too, Russian literature—not to speak of her callous attitude toward suffering.

So it was, then, in furtherance of Germany's Eastern propaganda, that Khooni Dai, a pukka Tibetan, and a thorough-going admirer of the German nation, for upward of a twelvemonth while the War was in full blast, came to be graciously permitted to hold forth in nearly all the bigger German towns upon his own especial Secret Doctrine. How and when he entered

Germany in the first place mad bronchos wouldn't drag from me ; but I've no doubt that somewhere in the police archives in Berlin you might find a most convincing explanation. He didn't enter without one, you may be quite sure.

Most certainly Khooni Dai gained a big reputation, and converts—of a sort. He was received into the " best " households in the capital, receptions were held in his honour ; he might have rivalled Rasputin, had he desired it ; but not one whisper was ever heard besmirching Khooni Dai's personal morality. It was the other way about ; for instance, I myself, while waiting at dinner one evening in the hotel restaurant, overheard a notorious Berlin society beauty softly bewail that Khooni Dai was her one failure.

" I believe," she said, with a shrug of her ample shoulders, " the poor fellow is better fitted to be the major-domo of a Turkish harem."

And yet Khooni Dai was no Apollo. To me, when first I clapped eyes on the strange creature, with his yellowish, full-moon face and his dingy, monkish robe of some hand-woven blanket-stuff, he seemed repulsive ; suited, one would say, to be the superintendent of a yak stud rather than a squire of dames of any nationality. All the same, he must have made a pretty good thing out of his special stunt, judging by the twenty marks charged for admittance and the crowded audiences he attracted to the large hall or lecture room he had hired in the Leipzigerstrasse.

To reach the scene of Khooni Dai's operations I had to climb an imposing wooden staircase painted to resembled veinedmarble; there was plenty of gilt about, too, on the banisters and chandeliers. The walls on either side were adorned by gigantic oil-paintings of the nude which had more to do with Eros than with Art; and having been duly impressed by the tawdry grandeur, I paid my twenty marks to a woman stationed in a small " open " ante-room at the top of the stairs, then passed through a swing-glass door toward which, without speaking, she nodded.

When my eyes, fresh from bright sunshine outside, had grown accustomed to the meanly religious light, and my nostrils to the aroma of generously scented Society in the form of three hundred or so persons of both sexes who, seated upon divans and in easy chairs, gradually revealed themselves to my misty vision, I observed that the walls of the large rectangular room were draped with velvet hangings of light-blue sapphire, which bescreened even the windows and doors; and that the sole illumination came from a cowled electric globe which shed a cone of amber-tinted light upon a strange figure — Khooni Dai himself, who stood on a semi-circular dais at the further end of the room.

Unobtrusively I had edged and felt my way past a tall screen which " covered " the door to the nearest seat I could find, and there at the back of the hall I listened to the dulcet voice of the Seer expounding his

Secret Doctrine—for I was a few minutes late and Khooni Dai had already begun his discourse.

"Yo shang yo fa" (There is reward, and there is punishment), he was quoting in Chinese ; then he broke into execrable German that now and again evoked a titter from one or more of the ladies present, followed by a reprimanding *St! st!* from the more serious-minded of the audience. It was all a hotchpotch of Theosophy and Spiritualism, with nothing new in it, and how Khooni Dai could draw a fashionable throng together, here in this hall during war time, I couldn't fathom, unless I were to assume that the people came merely hungering after new sensations, which, frankly, the Seer failed to arouse in me. I myself had lived too long in the Orient for that.

I gathered that after Khooni Dai's oration or sermon a mediumistic séance would take place, and I had endured perhaps twenty minutes of the twaddle when the Seer became silent, and clasping his hands across his breast, his face upturned toward the amber light above, and with eyelids closed, he stood motionless for quite a minute. Whether he was "praying" or supposedly in active receipt of an occult message from another world than ours I naturally didn't know, and I was pleased when he came to life again and spoke.

"I seek a *chela*,"* crooned Khooni Dai. "It is written that a number shall reveal the Master's choice."

* *Chela* : a disciple ; an amanuensis ; a medium—the word has a wide Theosophical meaning.

His audience rustled and shuffled in unison, as if intensely expectant of what was to come; and presently down from his dais without another word or sound stepped Khooni Dai, and began to flit hither and thither among his guests in a manner suggestive of the antics of a twilight bat in a " slow-motion " picture on the kinematograph. From group to group he flitted, now almost with the alacrity of an *al fresco* minstrel taking round the hat, now like a bird of prey with outstretched pinions, bending over its quarry. I could see that he was making play with something vaguely luminous ; and whenever he stood still I caught the sound of his muttering, just a few words at a time, a sort of incantation ; but beyond a few giggles and bass clearings of throat I remained unenlightened, until the strange, robed figure, with one wide-sleeved arm uplifted, bore down upon me and stood behind my chair.

The next instant I became aware that the luminous object had been slid in front of my face, a thing shaped like a lady's oval hand-mirror, so far as I could make out. Then I heard the same incantation that I suppose the others had heard.

" I seek a *chela*," Khooni Dai softly sang in my ear. And lowering his voice a shade above a whisper, he added : " Speak not ; but if thou hast heard the Master's number, write the number given to thee with the forefinger of thy right hand upon this crystal."

That was the straight tip, anyhow.

Without hesitation I began to trace the number 36 with my finger-tip upon the smooth, luminous surface, and in the wake of my finger misty figures grew visible and remained so. No sooner had I finished than Khooni Dai's right sleeve brushed past my cheek, and his own forefinger traced beneath my figures the number 63. Promptly I made a little addition sum of them and traced the total 100 ; and, as might be supposed, the seer appeared to think that a fellow so daft in arithmetic as I couldn't possibly be the *chela* he sought ; for at once his hand swept across the luminous surface like a sponge over a slate, and the shadow-figures vanished. And then I felt what I conjectured to be a thin brochure pressed into my right hand, and as Khooni Dai glided from behind me and floated back toward his dais, he solemnly intoned the following :

"When the Master withholds he withholds. Yet, though his book remains unopened and unread, within its covers does the Truth abide."

All tricks of a showman ; spoof, drivel, you will say. Yes ; but for me the last bit of drivel had a meaning ; for Khooni Dai had of design uttered the solemn nonsense in Tamil, a language which I know well.

I didn't wait to hear and see the rest of the programme. Instead, quietly and, I think, unobserved, I slipped round the tall screen through the door of the hall into the little ante-room.

Sitting at her table was the woman who had taken my admittance fee ; and in spite of my preoccupation,

I couldn't help likening her to an amiable crocodile. With her short arms crooked against the sides of her tartan green-brown-yellow bosom, she was knitting at terrific speed a grey woollen ribbed stocking, while placidly chatting with a one-armed police-officer who stood before her manufacturing those quasi-amatory glances that even our own police are not unguilty of—when they get the chance.

As the swing-door softly closed behind me, he grinned and shut one eyelid, which I took to imply an adverse criticism of Khooni Dai's performance, as well as of my own gullibility in attending such a show.

" Did you get a message from your Aunt Maria," he enquired, " about that five marks she lent you to get your boots soled and heeled ? "

How a haphazard phrase may unwittingly strike home ! The question, uttered of course in all innocence, for the moment gave me the jumps ; but as I am not too tardy in repartee I flung back pleasantly that instead of hearing from my Aunt Maria I had received a message from his own father, whose head had been lopped off by the *Scharfrichter*, enquiring if his son, a policeman, had yet been arrested for trigamy—a sally at which the woman attendant smiled faintly, then wanted me to purchase from a pile at her elbow one of the brochures whose fellow I had already been made a present of. She seemed rather persistent, but assuring her that I had about as much faith in Secret Doctrines as I had in Secret Remedies, and with another

little pleasantry, I cut the interview short and hastened down the gaudy staircase into the street.

It was not until late that night, about 2 a.m., that I found opportunity to examine closely the brochure Khooni Dai had surreptitiously given me, and to do this I had to sneak out of the basement dormitory in which I slept together with five other waiters. Satisfied that my colleagues were all sound asleep, I crept out of the dormitory, stole into the large general kitchen, laid hold of an earthenware bowl and filled it from the constant hot-water tap, and had " indigestion " on the tip of my tongue, ready for the night-watchman, should he surprise me in the act and demand to know what I was about.

As it happened, no one interrupted my trespass (it was all that : you should have read the regulations !), and with my bowl of steaming water I repaired to a wash-basin in a secluded corner near the crockery store, where, with ears sharpened for the sound of approaching feet, I proceeded to give the covers of the brochure a Turkish bath.

The twenty pages of print about Khooni Dai's Secret Doctrine I had already scrutinised, and I felt pretty certain that they contained no cypher. Besides, the Seer had said " within the covers " ; and sure enough, a very careful dissection of them resulted in my finding a thin sheet of paper, about six inches square, which had been imperceptibly concealed between the

mottled green and purple linen binding and the cardboard of the back cover.

One side of the little sheet of paper was packed with tiny scrawlings in jet-black Indian ink, written, I judged, with a mapping-pen. Yet tiny as the script was, I recognised the handwriting at once from its atrocious illegibility.

Yes ; I could now put a name to Mr. Khooni Dai ! Now I knew why, after Chinese and German, he had broken out into Tamil. In the long ago he and I had been colleagues and cronies in India, and the number 36 that I'd traced on his crystal, or whatever it was, had proved my present official identity to him,* as his own atrocious " fist " now unmasked Khooni Dai to me for the astounding " Tibetan " old fraud that he was.

Really, his handwriting was the worst I've ever scanned. It would have given old Belshazzar an apoplectic fit. Among other things, when my friend dotted an " i " it was generally dropped on the head of an unoffending consonant nine letters further on ; if he crossed a " t " it masqueraded as an accent or a dash over, perhaps, a sibilant ; never by any chance did

* 1. " Khooni Dai " was a " mystery man " in Northern India and Tibet, much as Colonel Lawrence was in Arabia. I can say no more.

2. The number 36. To whatever number of one or two figures I might have traced, Khooni Dai would have added a number which would have made 99. But the final safety " key " lay in the arithmetical error which made the total 100.

he use a punctuation mark, never a capital letter. In spite of being B.A. Oxon. he spelt less accurately than an eight-year-old ; his accursed Greek " e " always resembled " r " ; his 5's were 3's, or the reverse ; and —well, devil take me if in this communication on a six-inch square bit of paper he hadn't done his very worst and damnedest. Still, like the poet Byron, who couldn't do a simple addition sum, Khooni Dai had genius in other directions.

Forgive the jeremiad ; but it cost me a solid hour of eye-strain beneath an inefficient electric light before I could master the scrawl sufficiently to read it through as a consecutive whole, memorise the lot of it, and feel that I could safely destroy the paper. Happily, like the late Mr. Bonar Law, I have an exceptional, I almost said photographic, memory. Set me the task, and I could repeat word for word a newspaper column after one careful reading ; but let me prove my memory now by repeating what Khooni Dai had written :

" Ref. XCX (unable to verify or comment)—German Intelligence (political propaganda arm) convinced that Britain on verge internal rebellion large scale—intends to land quantity (not known) small arms, ammunition and gold (amount not known) by submarine. Confirming messenger who has appointment with British organiser (XCX ?) left Berlin (date unknown) via Russia (Sweden ?). Date of proposed landing of arms and sinews September 15th, earliest but

suitable conditions weather, etc., awaited. Place. . . ." [Details censored.]

To the foregoing Khooni Dai had supplemented a few " worth-while " items of information which, since they do not affect the story under way, I will omit ; but there was a final note which was of direct value and importance to me personally, for without it I should have had an insuperable difficulty in getting back to England from Berlin in time to hand over Khooni Dai's information to headquarters before September 15th. The note ran thus :

" In case of need a passport to Berne awaits you here. Return and buy from Frau Schultz, the attendant in the ante-room, the brochure on sale there. She is not such a fool as she looks ! Savvy ? Queer things happening in this old War—what ? Good luck to you ! "

That afternoon, free from duty for a while between *Mitagessen* and *Kaffee*, I dressed for " the road," tipped them the wink and told my fellow menials that I had a private affair of the heart to attend to, and, without a word to the Herr Ober, took French leave and paid a second visit to Khooni Dai's Hall of Mysteries ; and, after dodging the one-armed police-officer, whom I espied patrolling the pavement, I gained the ante-chamber at a time when Khooni Dai's introductory palaver would be in full swing.

The crocodile lady sat at her table in sole charge, knitting a grey-ribbed stocking as furiously as ever. As alone I mounted into view up the wide staircase I saw that she shot a momentary glance at me, but in it I read no vestige of recognition or interest; not that I wanted or expected any, if she were Frau Schultz, for whom, by the way, owing to her services to the Allied Cause during the War, I and other people will always have the greatest admiration and respect; though I have never been able to learn just who she was domestically in Berlin. I have a shrewd suspicion that Scots blood flowed cannily in her veins.

Halting before her table, I bowed and wished her "Guten tag" . . . "Gnädige Frau, permit me to offer my apologies if yesterday I appeared impolite," said I. "To tell you the truth, Herr Khooni Dai spoke of things which a mere *kellner* like myself cannot be expected to understand. I was disappointed; but perhaps if I purchase the little book you wished to sell to me I shall be able to grasp his ideas more easily."

She hardly glanced at me, and the only answer I got was the uninterrupted clicking of her needles. I began to fear that I had put my foot in it, that there might be a hidden watcher; and I was about to beat a diplomatic retreat when she dropped her knitting into her lap, pulled open the mouth of the large blue calico bag containing her ball of wool, and drew from it what looked like a replica of the " Doctrine " brochure, piles of which lay upon her table.

" Fünf mark," said she sternly, holding the volume out stiffly, but without leaning her body forward, so that I had to stretch over the table to get it. Just as her manner seemed to imply " caution " (it was not only visible but invisible eyes one feared in Berlin at that time), I tucked my especial copy of Khooni's " Doctrine " into an inside coat pocket with studied nonchalance and planked down the five marks. And by way of carrying on the little piece of acting, I picked up a top copy from the piles in front of her, remarking: " I will take another one, too, gnädige Frau : I have a friend, a police-officer, whom I may meet on my way out ; it might help the poor fellow to solve his matrimonial troubles."

She smiled a little at that, but again her needles were flying as if to make up for lost time. " Another five marks, please," she said, knitting faster than ever.

I paid, thanked her, bowed in farewell, and descended the stairs. I itched to turn round to learn if her eyes had followed my retreating form, but I couldn't for the life of me.

But to return to my second special copy of Khooni Dai's brochure : between two leaves stuck together I found, I think, the most devilishly clever piece of documentary ingenuity I've ever struck, since it enabled me, barely an hour later, to leave Berlin for Berne, anticipating no more interrogation or scrutiny than I should have undergone in the days of peace. Needless to

say, I prefer not to disclose the nature of the document, for reasons which should be obvious.

What the Herr Ober thought of it, and what action he took, if any, when I failed to return to my job that day I haven't the foggiest notion.

I reached Southampton on September 13th, caught a quick train, and arrived at headquarters in the afternoon on the stroke of two.

My Chief, when I entered his room (after suffering the usual form-signing business in the corridor, and the shepherding of a pretty little flapper), casually nodded at me as if I'd just been across the way to the Ship for luncheon, and as if he considered I'd been quite long enough over it, too ; then without any enquiry as to the state of my health, or even remarking upon the tantalisingly fine weather, he thrust at me across his big office table a sheet of typewritten foolscap, and at once buried his nose in the hummocky little sea of papers lying before him.

Knowing, by now, my man and his time-saving methods, I sat down opposite him to study the document.

It was headed : " Copy. Free translation from original German," at each side of which were the never-failing reference numbers and initials. Though obviously a letter, no addressee was indicated.

Shorn of the preamble and a few lines at the end, both of which do not in any way affect the tale I am telling, this is how the letter ran :

". . . Here [in England], in spite of the absurdly excessive munition wages, industrial centres are seething with discontent, and disloyalty which cries out for a lead and an outbreak; and everywhere there are established nuclei ready to expand and join together in an active proletariat army which shall first seize by armed force the municipal functions, the munition factories, and the railways; compel a disastrous stoppage of food and war supplies; and thereby create and complete a Communist revolution, which the great bulk of the now tired British armies secretly desires and would join in, if opportunity were provided. We need hardly point out that in the event of large internal disturbances in England, considerable drafts would have to be withdrawn from the Fronts abroad, and that even if this were the only result, it would be to the Fatherland's great advantage. . . .

"But our nuclei here are supine and powerless unless arms can be distributed to them. An attempt to seize arms and ammunition anywhere in England is out of the question. Ireland is now cut off; and even if, as originally we purposed, arms might be landed there, consigned to us, they would assuredly be commandeered by the Sinn Feiners for their own purposes. We suggest, therefore, and believe it quite possible and safe, that a landing in England of small arms and ammunition could and should be effected by submarine as soon as possible, together with British specie, to the value of £5,000 at least, for immediate propaganda and

executive expenses which are absolutely essential. Other landings to be arranged must follow. The time is ripe and we urge compliance and a speedy reply by accredited messenger as before, so that the exact place already decided upon for the landing by our Central Council may be communicated to you. . . ."

The letter was signed " X C X."

Bunkum !—you say ? I agree that the slander of the ill-paid British fighting man and of the highly-paid British worker at home was not only bunkum but the vilest of vile bunkum. But if any sane, patriotic Briton doubts that there were in this country of ours a host of ill-begotten, half-breed, mongrel-minded traitors bearing British names, who weren't fit to lick the shoes of the scum of the Levant (and that's saying something), who wouldn't have taken £5,000 from hands smeared with their own mothers' blood, and who glutted their devilish lusts upon propaganda (forsooth !) designed to excite crimson, carmine Revolution with its wholesale murder and rapine ; who set out to poison our young children's minds and morals, yes, even in so-called Sunday-schools, these self-same unspeakable traitors to whom an absurdly tolerant country allows the Parliamentary and municipal vote, and who in this England of ours are at and about their dirty devilish mischief at this very moment in nineteen twenty-seven ; —well, if you say that there are sane patriotic Britons

who still doubt what I am saying, I'll pick up my hat, eat it, say the Germans and Turks are God's own supermen, then swim to Greenland and become an Eskimo for ever. . . .

I get hot under the collar when I come across respectable and reputable people who wallow in fictional detective rubbish, and who will yet shrink away in sanctimonious disbelief and disgust when Truth has ugly yet vital things to say.—Very well.

When I'd finished reading the thing I glanced across the table, to find my Chief surveying me in his usual skew-whiff fashion, one eye through and the other above the glass of his slanting pince-nez.

" Ach-her-er-hum ! " he coughed quickly through his shut lips. " Cheerful, isn't it ? We've got to thank the Professor for letting us get a look at that. Know anything of X C X ?—Sounds like Somebody's brand of beer, eh ? The Home Office don't know him. Know anything of X C X ? " he repeated.

" I'm afraid I don't," I replied, diving my hand into my breast pocket, " but I can cap that communication."

" Ach-her-er-hum ! Your report ? " He stretched out a hand for it. " Cap that communication, eh ? Who did you meet over yonder ? "

" Khooni Dai, sir."

The Chief, who was held to be the most unsmiling Chief in the whole of the Services, actually thawed into a grin as wide as my own ; and immediately hid it

behind his broad hand. " Thought you would," he said. " Clever fella, that ! "—knitting his brows to drive away any false impression I might have gained of his levity. " Have a cigar while I look at your stuff," he commanded.

For the next ten minutes or so I sat not far from his elbow watching filoplumes of blue smoke weave arabesques on a gossamery scarf of silver sunshine, stretched tight from the top of the blind-drawn window to the bottom of the closed door, and, to say truth, envying gentlemen in khaki who had a permanent job in London ; then another " Ach-her-er-hum ! " pulled me to a stiffly upright position in my semi-easy chair.

" Any suggestion ? " queried the Chief.

I shook my head. " It all fits in too nicely to be a hoax. No, I won't say that ; I'll say, to be disregarded."

" Disregarded ! " he snapped. " And who, d'you suppose, would work up a hoax like this ? "

" Hardly credible," I hastened to palliate. " Still, what sticks in my gullet is the phrase X C X uses : ' By accredited messenger, as before.' It implies that an enemy agent has been able to get into England—— "

" And haven't you got into Germany once or twice ? " he barked. " We can't lay claim to *all* the genius. Submarines or neutral ship—I don't care a mouldy straw how—somebody's *got* in. If X C X's letter and your report mean anything at all, that's plain as a pikestaff." He stopped short, waiting for

me to speak, and jabbed at his eye-glasses, which were tilted at an angle too lopsided even for him.

" There's one item," I ventured. " To-day is the thirteenth. If the reply messenger X C X mentions is coming, he's here by now ; and if the landing comes off we can scoop in the infernal lot, X C X included."

" Ach-her-er-hum ! That's obvious even to our poor stay-at-home brains. Not our job, anyway. Yet . . ." He paused thoughtfully, tapping his compressed lips with the tips of two stiffly extended fingers ; presently he dropped them and tapped my report. " This is memory stuff ? Certain of your dates ? "

I began to explain that I was certain as Khooni Dai's atrocious scrawl allowed, but he cut me short savagely.

" Futile question, anyway—waste of time—waste of time . . . thirteenth—fifteenth . . . runs it fine . . . Christmas Night ! " he exploded, glancing at the clock on the mantelshelf. " Look here, young man, you've got to slip down to this confounded landing-place described in your report and have a private view—private, I say. That's about the size of it. And look here, this confounded landing and all the rest of it is possible, or it isn't possible. Decide for yourself and wire me Yes or No by ten o'clock to-morrow morning latest. If it's Yes, Home Office will have to get busy, that's all. You'd better be off. There's a train from —— station at 3·7 ; you'll get there by 9 p.m."

Ay, sailors say : growl you may, but go you must.

My Chief, however, as once I had learnt to my cost, had no use for a man who growled at any time ; he reserved that monopoly for himself. So I just picked up my obedient hat and went. Besides, to catch the 3·7 meant a sprint and a smart taxi—after I'd gone through the form-signing business again, faced the flapper, and run the gauntlet of a score of gimlety eyes. . . . Me, too ! . . . It was almost as bad as being over there in Germany.

As a matter of fact, I did not arrive at my destination until nearly 11 p.m., after an age-long train journey entailing several changes ; then twelve bone-rattling, country miles in a hired, farmer's Ford driven illegitimately by a hare-brained, cross-eyed youth of fifteen, to a God-and-devil forsaken village that shall be nameless ; and finally a cut of six solitary miles afoot across to the coast, through No Where, eerie as Hades on a Sabbath afternoon.

All day the weather had been reproachless, and during my tramp along leagues of up-and-down, monotonous coast moors, the night sky above me was like a vast inverted pewter platter, pinked with ten thousand stars. I soon picked up my bearings ; but as I drew near to the coast I noticed that the stars were being blotted out, not by cloud, but by mist rolling in from seaward.

The mist held off just long enough, and no more, for me to gain and to recognise the miniature bay

delineated in Khooni Dai's information, and to take a peep down at the proposed German landing-place; really, a little crescent-shaped creek, walled round by steepish cliffs, with a drop to the shore of between fifty and sixty feet. I shall not describe it further, but I remember I was just thinking how admirably this " hole in the wall " would fit a secret enemy landing, when in rolled the first wave of the sea fog, a fine, transparent, silvery mist which lightened the darkness rather than increased it, accentuated objects close at hand, yet wiped out ruthlessly all else.

Aware suddenly that I stood dangerously near the cliff edge, I warily drew back, and about twenty yards inland, among the bracken, I found a seat in the form of a couch-like slab of rock upon which I indulged in a little rest and reflection.

Now, according to Khooni Dai's representation, on the southern wall of this little creek at my back, above high-water mark, there existed a fissure in the cliff, within which the stuff, landed by boat, was to be secreted until such time as Messrs. X C X & Co. should elect to spirit it away; and my present job, I may say, included a survey of this fissure, which, of course, would necessitate my descent of the cliff. Fagged though I was, after so much incessant travel on both sides of the Channel, the job had got to be done.

Mechanically I had been plugging my pipe, and I was on the point of shattering the Regulations under D.O.R.A. by igniting a match, when I heard a clearly

defined swishing through the bracken toward me. Nothing on four feet, I was sure ; no, just a regular *hwish, hwish* whose rhythm told me the disturber of the solitude was one of my own species. I caught the sound of words, too, though I couldn't pick out one of them.

Thrusting pipe and match-box into a pocket, I rose, tried to locate the sound more exactly, then took a few cautious steps forward ; and all at once the black figure of a man, with arms swinging, loomed up startlingly in the mist and almost strode into me.

We both halted and ejaculated " Hello ! " together.

There was a stupid silence. Although I couldn't see the man's features, I discerned that he wore a cloth cap and a long mackintosh, and that he had the inch or two above six feet which ever makes a straight-standing man a giant.

It was touch and go. His attitude suggested that he was about to lay hands on me, and my own hands were at the ready to do the same for him, if need be.

Then he relaxed and spoke. In an even, cultured English voice, with a trace of Midland or North Country in it, he asked me politely, almost apologetically : " May I enquire how it is that I find you here so near to the coast at this hour of the night ? "

My own manners failed me. " What the devil's it got to do with you ? " I retorted.

" Omitting the devil, it has got to do with me," he returned, without changing his tone. " I happen to

be a—er—gobbie—a coast-watcher, for the time being. Perhaps I'd better show you my badge of authority, though." He tugged an arm out of his weatherproof, and raised a crooked elbow close to my chin, so that I could see his armlet; and, I fancy, so that he could steal a good look at my face.

The badge was all right, but then, anyone could have obtained the thing by means of a little jiggery-pokery; as for his face, at any other time, and in any other place, I should have labelled it "all right," too.

"Yes; I recognise the armlet," I said; left it at that, and stepped back a pace carelessly, so that he should not misinterpret the move.

"Then you won't mind my repeating my question," he continued, still in a courteous tone.

"No; I don't mind you repeating your question, but I'm afraid I must decline to answer," I responded, courteously now in my turn.

"May I ask why?"

"I should much prefer not to," I replied; "if you'll excuse me. After all, even in war time I suppose a Briton has a perfect right to tread his native land—take a walk, say, in the middle of the night, if he's a mind to."

"I'm inclined to agree with you there," came the quiet reply; "but, you see, my instructions are that I must interrogate any stranger I encounter; and unless he answers satisfactorily—why, my job, so far as I

understand it, is simply to arrest him, which is a proceeding from which I hope to be free."

" Are you alone ? " I rapped it out purposely.

" That depends on what one means by alone," he replied with a strange inflection in his quiet voice.

" You were speaking to someone as you came along," I rejoined a trifle sharply.

" You heard me ? " He seemed amused. " Well, yes, I *was* speaking to someone. As a matter of fact, I was praying."

" Good God ! " I blurted out, quite taken aback.

" *To* the good God," he added quietly. " No one is alone when he speaks to God."

A gobbie praying aloud on patrol ! That took a bit of swallowing, if you like. Naturally, suspicion returned to me that the chap was a wrong 'un, who was trying to get a nice piece of bluff across ; but I wasn't having any. Determined to let him see that I was the last person to be gulled by cultured speech and palaver about prayer, I planted my feet firmly and stood squarely in front of him.

" You choose a strange time and a strange place for your devotions," I said meaningly.

" You think so ? " he replied. " In my opinion prayer is for all time. As for place : what place, what conditions, could be more suitable ? Prayer, my friend, needs no compass by which to reach the ears of the Almighty."

" Thanks for the sermon," I retorted. " In the

circumstances, that, too, seems out of place and time."

" Let me apologise," he said, bowing slightly. " I fancy we are at cross-purposes. You see," he went on naïvely, " I happen to be a parson, rather an unconventional one, I'll confess, and although I don't wear the orthodox clothing I am nevertheless a clergyman of the Church of England. I have also to confess that this is my first night's experience of coast-watching, and I'm not too sure of procedure. The fact is," he added, with a chuckle, " I came down here to my old home for a few days' rest and quietness, and the first thing I do is to relieve an old friend of his voluntary gobbie's job, and betray my ignorance first go off. I've challenged you, and you refuse to reply—well, what's to be done ? " He seated himself upon the long slab of rock which I had risen from.

" You say you belong here ? " I countered quickly. I couldn't rid myself of that last remaining fraction of doubt about him. He seemed almost too ingenuous.

" To the extent that I was born, bred and brought up not ten miles away," he replied, with just a shade in his calm voice of contemptuous tolerance for my impertinence. " At ——, to be precise ; where my father is still rector, if that conveys anything to you," he added.

It conveyed nothing : neither confirmed nor dispelled my doubt of the man ; (but I can't explain it)

such suspicion as remained in my mind had little or nothing to do with the next question which suddenly slipped off my tongue.

"Forgive the inquisitiveness," I found myself saying; " you said you were praying just now as you came along. Is it too much to ask the nature of your prayer ? "

He spotted my change of mood instantly, and responded to it with a frankness and sincerity that astonished me and, truth to tell, made me not a little ashamed of myself. " Not in the least," he replied, " not in the least. Why, who knows but that through you, through this strange, this accidental meeting of ours, may come the answer to my prayer ? . . . I fear I am rather a mystic," he went on, " since I believe in miracles, yes, those of to-day as well as in those that happened centuries ago. And I believe that miracles happen through prayer. I've known them to do so. You may retort that I am a very simple-minded person. I am ; because among other things this War has taught me that we parsons must go back nineteen hundred years before we can lead others one step forward. . . ."

I didn't interrupt him, and soon, sitting beside him, I learnt the nature of his prayer. He wanted a church—not a benefice for himself, but a decent brick and stone edifice (a tower could be added later on) instead of the tin shanty in which, as curate-in-charge, he ministered to a growing flock in the suburb of a sordid town.

There was no patron, no money source he could tap ; and, like himself, his parishioners, in spite of inflated wages, had little cash to subscribe to such a worthy object.

Yes, he prayed for a benefactor ; or, more precisely and mundanely, for the sum of £2,000 to go on with ; and I admit that by the time he'd finished, his sincerity and his childlike—I was going to say godlike—simplicity so touched me—and I am a hardish citizen ! —that inwardly I vowed I'd look at my bank balance with a magnifier as soon as I could, and send him a fat cheque for his church. I daresay you've met the kind of padre he was. Simplicity on one side, he was no woolly-minded nincompoop ; I'll wager his battalion didn't want to dodge his church parades. And that's as good a recommendation for a padre I can think of.

What he made of me I've no idea. I don't think he had a speck of suspicion (or fear !) in his make-up. We chatted, or rather he did, for twenty minutes, when he glanced at the glowing dial of his wrist-watch and burst out : " Wigs on the green ! I've got to be at the telephone hut at midnight, and two good miles to go !—Come with me ? "

" Sorry, no," I said ; " wrong way for me, and it's about time I was getting on."

We shook hands and wished each other good-night. " I say, forget me in your report, please," I added laughingly. " I give you my word I'm up to no mischief."

" Right," he assented cheerily ; " I never thought you were—but, by the way, don't you forget that prayer never goes amiss, whatever the time or place." And with that he swung round, trudged off, and the mist shut him out of my sight like a velvet curtain.

Yes, I voted that parson absolutely Number One ; but, if you'll think it out, you'll realise that I couldn't exchange confidences with him. Had I done so, I'm convinced that he would have deemed me unresponsible for my actions and stuck to me like a limpet, which would have made things deucedly awkward.

After he had gone I gave myself a further five minutes' rest before tackling my own job in earnest. Messrs. X C X & Co., I argued, would hardly choose to operate by boat, and therefore I might expect to discover a negotiable way down the cliffs with which they no doubt were acquainted.

Not without caution I approached the edge again. Below me, though I couldn't see it, the sea-pool lay still as a sleeper, breathing, now sharply, now languidly —so it seemed—whirls of silver mist that came floating up the rugged wall of rock like puffs of smoke ascending an open fire-grate.

Slowly I began to make my way round the northward side, because I'd noticed the cliff there didn't tower so high and the face of it was jagged and jutted.

But I'm not going to inflict upon you the details of my descent, which I found wasn't hazardous or difficult for an athletic chap of my sort.

Enough that I zig-zagged down in safety, and that barely half an hour after bidding good-bye to the parson-" gobbie " my feet stood upon a narrow, sickle-shaped patch of dry sand, between the water's edge and the loose boulders of rock strewn anyhow all round the foot of the cliffs. Of the wrack so prevalent in these parts, or seaweed, I could see nothing, but there was a new moon somewhere and I knew that the tide was at or about low ebb. The state of the tide and the time it had taken me to get down the cliff I want you to bear in mind ; both are of importance ; and you will recall my mention that the mist, though shrouding the world beyond, rendered more darkly the objects lying close at hand.

My eyes fixed just ahead of my feet, then, as a preliminary, from the northern side of the creek I began to walk along the water's edge toward the horn of the southern ; and I'd not gone far before something brought me to a dead halt and shot a thrill through me ; for there, by the living Jingo ! in sand glisteningly wet I came upon freshly made footprints ! Ay, and made within the hour too ; not to say that within another hour they'd be obliterated by the incoming tide.

Well, when he discovered Man Friday's footmark Robinson Crusoe couldn't have been more astounded than I was then.

I admit my first thought went back to the parson, and how his suave, sermonising speech and manner,

his open-air " praying," had thoroughly gulled me. But these footprints in the sand I *knew* could not be his ; relative time and the state of the tide made that impossible. I knew, therefore, that while we'd been talking upon the top of the cliff, here, beneath us, deep in the mist, someone had landed from the sea. And when I'd examined the footprints closely I felt pretty sure that more than one person had waded ashore. I couldn't trace the mark of a keel. The boat, doubtless a " collapsible," had been held off purposely. I could appreciate that.

Yet—and let me make this clear—although it was arguable that the parson had deliberately and designedly *kept* me in converse, I acquitted him freely, fully and utterly, of all connivance or knowledge of the landing. My own renewed, fleeting suspicion of him shamed me the moment it came. Please, in your turn, understand that.

But it didn't alter the fact that someone had landed; and who but the enemy ? . . . In a flash, as if chalked in white on a blackboard, it came to me—Khooni Dai's accursed handwriting had beaten us all. I had read September 15th ; he had written (!) 13th. Wigs on the green, indeed ! A pretty nice wigging I might expect from the Chief.

Unless the enemy had inveigled a neutral tramp skipper to take on the job, a boat had stolen in from an enemy submarine ; the submarine had slipped away scot-free. England had been invaded—that's what it

amounted to. The fact would take some hushing up ; and it would *have* to be hushed up, ay, for many years to come.

Within ten minutes, though the footprints helped little and the rocks over which I had to scramble betrayed no sign of human traffic, I'd found proof positive : yes, proof in the material form of 25 magazine pistols * in bundles of five, each in oilskin bags ; 20 cord-handled small boxes of ammunition, also in packages of five and covered with oilskin ; and five small hardwood cases, cord-handled but bare, of German make and design, as I recognised.

Not a very formidable contribution toward starting a Communist rebellion, you may say. Yet there the retail stuff was, out of sight from above or below, neatly tucked away at arm's-length in a left-to-right slantwise fissure, fifteen feet above shore level, and just wide enough for me to thrust in my head and shoulder.

What was I to do ? I couldn't leave the packages there. At any moment, taking advantage of the mist, X C X and his gang might come along. What *could* I do ? While puzzling out the answer I began to drag out the things one by one on to the broad, projecting ledge where I stood perched. Even this seemed futile, for I couldn't carry them up the cliff, nor yet waste treacherous time in hunting about in the mist for

* These pistols and the ammunition proved to be Russian : the fact alone was a commentary on German methods.

another suitable hiding-place, which I might not find. To cut it short—there remained the sea.

Down from the ledge to the sand with the stuff and up again I toiled, until I'd got the lot in a nice little heap ; then, having quickly peeled my legs of my trousers, I waded out, thigh deep, and hurled the packages, two by two, into three or four feet of water, where I guessed they'd not be discovered before I'd pegged the Communist devils under the official net.

I said I hurled the packages into the sea. Yes, but not all of them ; for as I neared the water's edge with the last two hardwood uncovered cases, bent on their sharing the fate of their fellows, I had an inspiration.

Each of these boxes weighed, I estimated, about twenty pounds ; and happening to recollect that one thousand English sovereigns weigh exactly nineteen pounds, and that Mr. X C X had stipulated for £5,000, I didn't need it printed on the five small uncovered boxes to be assured that in each of them lay tightly packed the sum of £1,000 in gold coin. That is to say, I knew that I gripped in my two hands the sum of £2,000 ; and, as I said, I had an inspiration.

I'd reached the edge of the water when it seized me with full force ; pulled me up short, and set me chuckling. The joke ? Well, y' see, my inspiration had its origin in the padre's prayer . . . and what was a miserable £2,000 to the British Treasury, anyway ? . . . And what was a weight of forty pounds avoirdupois to a powerful chap like me ? And wasn't there the

be-screening mist to aid and abet me ? . . . And besides, I'd taken a mighty fancy to that parson and I didn't see why his heartfelt prayer shouldn't materialise sooner than he expected.

I wish I could leave it at that. But the tale has a few loose ends left fluttering in the breeze, which must be gathered together. Besides, I haven't yet confessed the " crime." Very well.

Unfortunately X C X and his gang we failed to lay by the heels, unless unidentified and unsuspected they were rounded up on another account ; that mystery has never been cleared up, and isn't likely to be.

As for my part in the transaction, you may assume quite rightly that from the Chief I got it in the neck full and plenty ; coupled with searing advice to consult an oculist and to study Someone on Memory. But then, with Khooni Dai's wicked brand of handwriting the Chief couldn't boast personal acquaintance, and I could forgive him, because the discrepancy between the £5,000 mentioned in " Information Received " and the £3,000 eventually retrieved from Davy Jones' locker was apparently attributed by him to another misreading by me of Khooni Dai's figures—that, or to well-known German parsimony. Naturally I preserved a profound silence upon the subject.

Now I'm breaking that silence when I tell you that, to-day, in a sordid suburb of a certain equally sordid town you may find a newish-looking little brick and stone church, which you may learn came to be erected

through the munificence of a mysterious donor who desired to "remain anonymous." The edifice, I am told, still lacks a tower; but my friend, the padre, thought the world and all of it before pneumonia on top of German chlorine gas took him straightaway to Heaven—where he rightly belonged.

CHAPTER VI

A TRICK ON THE TELEPHONE

No barrage has yet been invented which will effectually prevent a resourceful Intelligence officer from entering enemy country during hostilities.

Of course, Karl Hans Lody * and the other German spies who succeeded in getting into Britain during the War never had a chance from the very first. Our own Secret Intelligence Branch possessed foreknowledge of nearly all of them ; a foreknowledge of their physiognomies, of their height and build, of their intentions, and of their cut-and-dried, and often puerile, tactics. Besides, these Germans and German-hired neutrals would have betrayed themselves anyhow : they were machine-made at ridiculous " Schools for Espionage " ; like the creatures of melodrama manufactured to pattern, their joints creaked at every turn ; badly cast, too, for their parts, they lacked the temperament of the clever spy, who must have liquidity, not woodenness. Then, these machine-made spies

* Lody was the one " superior " active German spy : a senior lieutenant of the German Naval Reserve.

would carry about with them incriminatory addresses, invisible inks and codes; they *would* write stupid letters; they *would* pretend to be commercial travellers bent on (imaginary) business; and last, but not least, their paymasters invariably provided them with inadequate and tardily forthcoming funds.

But I want you to carry back your mind to 1916. At that stage of the War, after the first flush of spy-fever had faded away, how many English people following their business or their pleasure at, say, Paddington railway terminus, or at any of the popular or " select " London hotels, bothered their heads about spies; would have suspected a clever German spy, had they encountered one—even had they unwittingly hob-nobbed with him, in whatever guise he had chosen to adopt ? Even those officials, police and civilian, whose duty it was to watch the human tide and to inspect forms and registers, did so now as a matter of routine minus their first perfervid zeal and active suspicion; and, the postal censorship apart, the real spy-catcher kept his eyes open for, or trailed, a definite and detailed someone, just as he was wont to do in peace-time. Why, there were English people in most of our big cities who were not even on the national register ! And I venture to think that had he contrived to enter Britain unsuspected, a faked National Registration card would have carried an enemy Secret Service agent along, even after the Food Control came into force, much more safely than a passport, forged or genuine. All said and done, in

these days, when once suspicion has provoked minute investigation a spy's number is up, so while he is about it he may just as well ply his imagination, and make the boldest throw of the dice against Fate.

The Professor maintained all along—and I think he was right—that we need fear nothing from native German spies in Britain, because the Teuton is so racially, mentally and physically " hall marked " (take only the shape of his head ; his military mannerisms, his stiff bow from the waist, with heels clicked), that he *must* betray himself sooner or later. The German-American of the second generation may offer a different proposition ; but just as one is said to scratch a Russian and find a Tartar, so you may scratch a German-American and find a " dinkum " Deutscher, as events proved during '14-'18.

Let all that, however, be as it may—this little preface seems necessary to provide the reader with a sense of proportion in estimating my own risk of detection during the visit to Berlin which I now narrate. There, too, as in London, spy-fever had died down ; indeed, Germany as a whole, omitting the munition and troop centres, was far more excited, or, say, malevolently hawk-eyed in the matter of escaping prisoners, English or French, than around the possibility of a spy rubbing shoulders with her citizens, especially in the Prussian metropolis, whose principal streets seemed a-froth with pleasure-seekers only too ready and anxious to escape altogether the atmosphere of War. A rabid

craving for Pleasure; notably in the form of strange orgies; a distinct slackening of the first rigorous prohibition of mufti for anyone attached to the Army, Navy, or Air Force; a touch of general slovenliness: these I noticed at once. And beneath the froth I detected in the Berliners a mood both chastened and chilled, the sure forerunner of that more or less secret despair which was to arrive later. Certainly I found Fritz and his Frau no longer " cocky," but even heard whispers in public places, eloquent of their growing doubt that Germany would finally emerge *über alles*.

Nevertheless, throughout Germany the authorities were vastly more thorough about personal identification than we were; and the German who wished to travel from town to town had warning to carry upon him not only his military papers (if his age necessitated them), but his marriage-lines, his current income-tax receipt, his university or school diploma, his title-deeds or " certificates of property," his bank pass-book and any official correspondence whatsoever that might concern or vouch for him.

Yet, again, this very thoroughness defeated itself: the multitude of personal vouchers acted as a fog; it often bandaged close inspection. At least, it was my own experience that on the few occasions when my " papers " were demanded they were but perfunctorily scrutinised. Time, and—as I took care—a queue of other people waiting with papers as diverse and voluminous as my own, wouldn't allow anything else. And,

as I said, suspicion had become blunted ; in Berlin especially the civilian officials had sunk back into their old normal-routine officialdom ; they were, indeed, " dug-outs," ancient and tiredly inefficient ; and—this is the great point !—they certainly were not on the look-out for a definite, enemy someone, details of whom had been supplied to them by the higher branches of the Intelligence Service.

Unlike poor Karl Hans Lody and his imitators, I had entered Germany by an easy door, and quite " legitimately."—My thanks to the Professor for that, and for the provision also of unimpeachable papers, which conveyed to senile and spectacled officialdom that I was " Ernst Belderbusch," aged 64, exempt from military service, a retired shoemaker from Munich ; my means in the nature of dividends upon railway scrip entitling me to the predicate of " Herr Rentier," which term rendered into English is Mr. Income Possessor. As a matter of fact, lest my innocent *alter ego* be still alive and get called over the coals for his guilty innocence in the transaction, I hasten to add that " Ernst Belderbusch " was not the name on my papers. Purposely I substitute another name. The papers themselves were genuine, though, and I take this opportunity of thanking the real " Ernst Belderbusch " for the loan of them. Certainly with their aid I entered and dwelt in Berlin for nearly a fortnight, beset by no more difficulty than a retired draper from Exeter, or a calico " commercial " from Manchester, might have

experienced, had one or the other visited London in 1916 bent on business or pleasure. Naturally, I did not carry about my person or in my kit any jot or tittle of the paraphernalia of a spy. I relied boldly upon a memory so highly trained that, did necessity arise, it might gain me some sort of a living as a " Memory Man " on the halls, and upon an outward and inward seeming " German-ness " that, from education and long habitation in Germany, was second nature to me ; not forgetting, of course, my aforesaid papers.

Putting into practice a bluff which on more than one occasion proved itself sound, on reporting myself at the Polizeistation I asked the officer-in-charge if by chance he could recommend inexpensive lodgings, remarking jocularly that I hoped such recommendation would at least save him the customary trouble of looking me up. Strange as it may seem to the uninitiated, police the world over are not unfamiliar with similar requests from quite irreproachable though, it may be, highly apprehensive persons ; and from a list several addresses were given to me. Casually I chose the first, that of a certain Frau Koppen who, with her daughter, occupied a top-floor flat in the neighbourhood of the Danzigerstrasse ; and thither I hastened, armed with a brief note of introduction written on an officially-headed memorandum slip.

Frau Koppen was absent from home, at work in a gas-mask factory recently established in a distant suburb ; but her daughter, a poor emaciated thing of

about twenty, with a face the hue of a church cobweb and a distorted body (she wore permanently a surgical tube in her side, I believe), welcomed me without reserve, and on her mother's behalf offered me the use of a small and but scantily-furnished bedroom—her own—which was as clean as a new pin. She assured me that it would be a pleasure for her to turn out and sleep in her mother's room ; and divining that she acutely desired to have me as a lodger, after a brief make-believe haggling over terms, I deposited my bulky old carpet bag at the foot of the bed, and remarking that I supposed she would want an hour or so to make the room ready for me, I went out to get a highly necessary meal at a restaurant.

Poor souls, for the sake of the twenty weekly marks I agreed to pay, the Koppens would have housed and waited personally upon a Hottentot. Undoubtedly well-educated " superior " people, their little income from Government stock had dwindled nearly to nothing since War broke out ; and though the daughter tried vainly to cloak her eagerness to secure me and my rent, Frau Koppen herself was frankness itself in the matter. Had she possessed the physical strength after a solid twelve hours at gas-masks, not to speak of the long journeys to and from the factory, which necessitated train, tram, and a long plod across waste land, I believe she would have flung her arms round my neck and hugged me when she arrived home that night and her daughter formally introduced me.

Between them—though poor Anni had to bear the brunt of the extra work—they made me comfortable, except for keeping me awake and miserable half the night. Their bedroom adjoined mine, and through the flimsy yellow distempered wall I could hear Anni's niggling but almost incessant cough, interspersed with her mother's bouts of moaning, caused, I knew, by sheer fatigue that could find but inadequate relief in sleep. Yet—to the women's credit—never did I hear one word of complaint or recrimination from either of them. Heaven knows what became of the two when food in Berlin ran really short ; it hadn't done so then, although certain lachrymose propagandist pens in England and America had long before wailed prematurely and gratuitously about the iniquity of starving the " poor Germans." Deliberate dressed-up tripe, of course ; and in any case war is hellish enough without futile bemoanings over the imaginary or the inevitable : still, the Koppens of all belligerent nations have my sympathy ; and in Germany, rightly or wrongly, munition wages weren't shot sky-high in panicky distrust of the " working-class." Gad ! at home, how sick most of us were, and still are, of the agitator and his " classes " ! The term, as he employs it, bears no meaning at all to decent-minded people.

Of the special object of this particular mission of mine to Berlin I can only speak in limited terms ; for the right of dilating upon details doesn't rest with me. But I can say that my mission was not altogether

unconnected with one of the best-hated creatures of the last decade, a fiend in human form, if ever there was one, styled by some—and not without sound reasons—Anti-Christ.

I know this much : had I shot dead that inhuman clever devil in the foyer of the " Hebbel-Theater " in the Königgratzerstrasse when, during the interval, I stood three feet from his elbow while he munched a slab of bread and sausage and sipped a glass of lemonade, the killing would have amounted to, not murder but mercy, and would have saved the world, and Russia in particular, from an incalculable amount of misery—past, present and to come. That he himself eventually died raving mad offers no palliative, for look at the mort of heirs, executors, administrators and assigns he's left behind, as bad for the world and Christianity as himself.

But to resume. My special object apart, I'd instructions to keep my eyes and ears open wherever I might find myself in the chief enemy's capital city. True to my assumed character, I sauntered about Berlin at will ; and no niggardly hand having supplied me with the " ready," I lunched, dined and supped unstintedly at the " Siechen," the " Kaiser-Keller," and the " Winzerstuben " ; visited in turn the Variety houses, the " Apollo," the " Walhalla," and the cabaret " Chat-Noir " : in fact, anyone with half an eye might have recognised that, like other gentlemen of my kidney, I was up in town for the one purpose

of seeing all the shows that were to be seen and generally to do myself amply in an unobtrusive, beyond-my-prime manner. And, eating and drinking aside, inane stuff I found it all, though from my professional point of view it wasn't without interest and indeed valuable results. When one knows how to sift the wheat from the chaff, there's nothing like mixing oneself up with the froth of Society in order to gain tit-bits of information—political or otherwise.

And that is how and why I came to attend the " Countess's " Fancy Dress Reception.

I first heard of this Society function from a young Rittmeister (Cavalry Captain) in mufti, a sprig of nobility who appeared to conceive an affectionate regard for me after (I conjectured) his eighth or ninth cocktail at the Chat-Noir.

We sat together in an alcove apart from the chattering, guffawing crowd, and I may say at once that he attached himself to me by a simple process of gravitation ; that is, by staggering into the alcove and flopping himself like a hundredweight of coal slack into the one other chair at my side.

In military idiom, post-haste he began to inform me as lucidly as he could that he was enjoying six days' leave from the quagmire of Flanders, and that he had throughout gone the whole crimson bust ; that his father was a so-and-so miser who owned no less than forty-odd castles and five hundred thousand acres of arable land ; that he had a squinting old aunt with a

wooden leg, who wore ringlets ; that he thanked God for windmills, which cleansed the air of the foul odours of the peasantry ; that he was sure that women and not war would dig his grave for him ; that his uncontrollable fondness for drink (and here he touched an idea worthy of scientific investigation) was caused by the (recorded) total abstinence of his Silesian forebears during the last century and a half ; and then, interrupted by hiccoughs, a battered cigar that refused to be burnt, and an unattached monocle that had dropped in his drink, he went on to state more rationally that he had been that morning prematurely ordered by someone destined for Hades to rejoin his unit on the morrow ; that he had to leave Berlin at 6 a.m. sharp ; that he'd an assignation at midnight ; and finally that having, only a few hours ago, like a condemned fool, been bamboozled into giving two hundred marks for a ticket of admittance to an exclusive, unadvertised and " very warm show " (as he put it) to be held two nights hence, he now found himself with little more cash than would pay for a taxi to the lady's abode. I remember, too, that when as one man of culture to another he emphasised his belief in Nietzsche's dictum that woman was made for the warrior, and I expressed no disagreement, without more ado he asked me for a loan.

That captain, so busily engaged in turning pleasure into pestilence, was, indeed, most loquaciously and confidently drunk, but he held on to my arm in a

way that boded ill if I refused his request; and in secret dread of a scene that might focus me into dangerous notice I temporised by ordering for him yet another cocktail, which pacified his persistency only to the extent that instead of a loan he offered to accept one hundred and fifty marks for his precious ticket—or invitation card—which, together with his official recall, he produced and thrust into my unwilling hand for inspection.

Well, when I had read the name of the patroness, I'd have paid treble the price he demanded for the right to attend the " very warm show," let alone the immediate necessity of getting free from the chap's clutches. Without demur, then, I handed him the money, assured him that it had cleared me out of my last mark, wished him good-luck—and bolted. I heard him yell lustily for another drink; and all I can say is that if he kept his assignation at midnight, or caught his 6 a.m. train for the Flanders Front, his power of recovery from alcohol must have been superhuman.

The " ticket " I'd bought was printed in vermilion and gold lettering upon a square, thick, black and highly polished pasteboard with gilded bevels. It announced that, for the benefit of a certain War Fund, " Countess ——" invited the holder (unspecified) to a Fancy Dress Reception at her own house, beginning at 10 p.m. on the date given, masks might be worn; there would be supper at midnight, followed by entertainments

(unspecified) ; and since " carriages " were not mentioned, I suspected that the revelries might be drawn out until the breakfast-hour by those endowed with the requisite hardihood.

The " openness " of the ticket decided me. Possessing it, I, or anyone else, had the indisputable right to attend ; and the broad hint about masks told me pretty plainly that some of the guests would only consent or dare to attend if they might remain incognito, which was just what Ernst Belderbusch desired.

After arriving home that night, in the inevitable hours of the wakefulness abed, I hit on a bright idea, and next morning after breakfast I interviewed my younger hostess in the kitchen, which, with its shining blue and white tiles, its polished tinware, glass and china, flashed and sparkled in the streaming sunlight like the Cullinan diamond. Frau Koppen had gone to her gas-masks two hours earlier. I hardly ever met her.

" Fräulein Anni," I broached the subject, " what do you think ? Yesterday I was prevailed upon to buy a ticket for a high-life fancy-dress reception."

She looked at me with the ghost of a roguish smile behind her pale green eyes. " Indeed, Herr Belderbusch ! And are you going, may I ask ? "

" And why not ? " I asked, with adopted seriousness. " I have paid a big sum for the ticket, a very big sum ; more than I've ever paid in my life for such a thing.

Why should I not go ? Especially as the money falls to charity ? "

" Oh, in that case——" returned Anni, growing grave at once.

" Yes," I interrupted. " We Germans must give all we can spare to charity. We have to win the War, don't forget."

" We seem to be a long time doing it," she said, with a doubtful shake of her head. " I know I should not say so, Herr Belderbusch, but I think a bad day is coming for us."

" Im gegenteil " (On the contrary), I retorted cheerily. " We shall win the War, sure enough, Fräulein Anni——"

" But those English," she interposed. " According to their history they always win in the end."

" I do not remember reading so in my history books," I objected.

" No ; not in *our* history books," she replied. " But I have read other histories : Hume, and Green, for instance, in English. What are the English like in appearance ? " she broke off naïvely. " I have never seen an Englishman."

" Why, I myself might be one," I returned daringly and laughingly, looking her straight in the eyes.

" Ach ! nein ! " she replied instantly, with a shrug of her thin shoulders. " Ach ! nein ! You have German written all over you as plain as Nature writes Winter on the bare, inky trees. But this Fancy Dress—— ? "

she continued, as near laughter as I ever saw her, before or afterwards.

" Yes, that is the point," I answered, stroking my grey-bearded chin, " that is the point, Fräulein Anni, and that is why I should like you to help me. As you may judge, I am not so nimble as I once was, nor am I suited by my position in life to hob-nob with the nobility. Now I know that you are high and well-born and clever with your needle, and if you'll help me, of course I should be only too glad to make you a return for your assistance."

Whether or not the bait was necessary, Anni seized it at once.

" When is this reception, Herr Belderbusch ? "

" To-morrow night," I answered.

She paused a moment reflectively. Then, with a little backward jerk of her straw-yellow head—" I think I can help you, Herr Belderbusch," she volunteered. " I already have a notion. The material won't cost much. But you will want evening dress and patent shoes to wear underneath," she added, " which you can easily hire at ——'s," naming a clothier's and the street the shop stood in.

I thanked her, promising to take her advice, and then, as if in afterthought, I pledged her to silence on the subject, lest any " friend " or " relative " of mine should get wind of my spendthrift indiscretion ; whereat, her pale green eyes twinkling a little, she assured me that neither she nor her mother would dream of

whispering a syllable about me or the Reception outside the flat—and the Koppens' flat had no visitors.

Still, I knew perfectly well that Fräulein Anni itched to learn more, and it being poor policy to excite a woman's curiosity and leave it unsatisfied, I showed her my resplendent ticket.

She gave vent to a startled *Ei!* cut it short in the middle, and said no more. But it convinced me that the " Countess's " reputation was known to her ; and although Anni's promise of help was not withdrawn in consequence, I knew she thought me a very naughty old man. Anyhow, since eventually I should have to account to the Koppens (and like as not to the police) for my night out, I deemed it wise to prepare them beforehand, and, if possible, to enlist their interest, if not their approval.

Anni proved as good as her word ; moreover, she exhibited in her choice of a fancy costume for me a streak of humour which, for her kind, was out of the common. But there was a vein of malice in it, such as one finds not seldom in the majority of deformed human beings.

Meant to envelop me from top to toe, the costume turned out to be a robe or gown of orange-yellow stuff, thick and coarse, with "bishop" sleeves gathered in at the wrists, and with a hood affixed that, adjusted, completely shrouded my head and face, except for a stiffened vizor-like slit for the eyes, below which Anni had fastened a bulbous nose cut

from a pre-war carnival mask, whose nostrils suggested a camel's. The gown left nothing to be desired, barring its warmth, which would have delighted an Arctic explorer. Neat, if a trifle gaudy, big crimson crosses strayed asymmetrically all over it, and I didn't need reminding that the thing was intended to represent a San Benito of the Spanish Inquisition, and that in it I should look and feel a perfect guy.

Once inside the costume, I knew that I was going to suffer the tortures of the damned, even if, in the long run, I wasn't to be roasted alive at the stake. Perhaps Anni considered that I merited the fate, for when I tried on the " creation " over a hand-me-down dress-suit next evening the girl remarked :

" To make it quite the thing, Herr Belderbusch, you ought to carry the lighted taper of the penitent, but as the fat shortage forbids candles, I fear you must go without—unless the Countess will provide you with a real wax candle. No doubt *she* has plenty."

All the same, it wasn't a bad rig-out, and what's more, from my point of view I couldn't have imagined one that preserved Herr Belderbusch's incognito better ; but to avoid attracting undue attention in the modest neighbourhood of the Koppens' flat, when I set out for the Reception I carried my San Benito in brown paper and put it on in a taxi I picked up at a corner of the Danzigerstrasse about half-past ten. I didn't want to arrive too early and perhaps be one of a few.

The Countess's mansion—though it called itself a villa—stood some twenty paces back from the road in the aristocratic Tiergarten Quarter; from the outside it appeared quite dark and soundless, betraying no sign of the festivity that might reign within, if I omit the fact that one huge and ghostly automobile sighed and swirled away as I alighted, paid off my taxi, and, ticket at the ready rang the electric bell beneath the glowering portico.

The door swung open instantly, and, seeing no one, I boldly entered a large meagrely-lit vestibule; the door immediately closed again, as if of its own accord, and I presently found myself being grinned at by a seven-foot negro *—he was all that—in golden skin-tight tunic, short white drawers and bare feet, who in silence and with several salaams that were nearly kow-tows, accepted my ticket, relieved my arm of my overcoat and hat, gave me in exchange a cloak-room chit, then sweeping aside a curtain of tapestry, pulled open for me an inner door, with a sudden rolling of his bloodshot eyes and an extra wide exposure of his perfect set of china-white teeth betokening I knew not what.

The negro, and the oddity of my reception, I suppose, ought to have warned me, but for the next ten minutes,

* I afterwards learned that he had escaped from Russia, where he had served as one of the uniformed giant negro guard stationed outside the Palace of the Dowager Empress in Petersburg.

until I grew accustomed to the imitation twilight, the claggy warmth, the smell of incense seething from a brazier, which at first was so—what shall we say ?—physically disturbing, that it took me aback like an unexpected insult, not forgetting the non-appearance of the hostess or deputy—well, never had I felt so " out of it," forlorn and futile, except in nightmares of the outlandish but unterrifying sort. What might be the normal design and appearance of the interior of that mansion I've no conception ; the greater part of it had been transformed into an immense-seeming, domed cavern, draped and furnished like some magical chamber out of the Arabian Nights.

On my left a sort of minstrels' gallery (but no minstrels) of blood-red porphyry gradually revealed itself, likewise eight curving blood-red steps leading up to it on each side ; and then I observed five or six draped " tunnels " which upon inspection I found led off toward similar but smaller caves strewn with divans, couches and gaudily-patterned cushions.

From a hidden orchestra of twanging and wailing instruments and doleful drums strange music was playing when I entered the cavern ; victims of temporary dementia, a few fantastic shapes danced, pranced and pirouetted ; other mysterious shapes, all " on their own " like myself, strolled about aimlessly ; one or two couples lurked in shadow, and it was plain that the " very warm show " had not yet advanced beyond the tepid stage. Feeling rather like a fish out of water taking

stock of things on its tail, I did my best to seem idiotically at ease, and marooned around, only to consider myself as out of place as a grave-digger at a christening. In spite of the Benares brass trays laden with wobbling bottles of liqueurs and spirits and tinkling empty glasses, trundled about by men-servants got up with hairy goat-legs and the hooves of satyrs, wearing on their red-jacketed shoulders huge ass-head masks ; in spite of all the laboured scenic effects and properties, the show, I thought, promised to drag on as dull as a Board Meeting of a Crematorium ; until shortly after eleven, when, suddenly, as a thousand fairy lights blazed into being, there bounded in a squad of young officers in orthodox evening dress and no disguise—save that from the drink within them. When, at the sight of an ass-headed attendant, one of the young cubs started to bray vociferously, and another attempted to walk on his hands upon the polished floor, affairs began to grow lively, and the guests in the cavern were quickly reinforced by scores of others, who, helter-skelter, came tumbling over one another out of the various tunnels in varying degrees of hysterical excitement.

Decorum vanished ; the place rocked with hilarious laughter ; horseplay became general ; and one girl (clad scantily enough, be it said, and whether by accident or design I couldn't make out) had her frock, every shred of it, stripped from her back, and in the guise of Mother Eve had to beat a hasty

retreat, surrounded by a huddling, moving screen of others of her sex only slightly more clad than herself. In short, the whole performance began to take upon itself the characteristics of a rowdy, vulgar romp such as no doubt in earlier times led up by sure degrees to the celebration of a bacchanalian orgy.

Of the costumes I need say little ; a few, a very few, were in " character," and good ; but among the women, for the most part their scantiness must pardon the scantiness of my description. Except the hostess, the young officers (and two others I shall mention by and by), everyone wore facial disguise of some sort ; but it soon became patent from the names one heard screamed out that by now the majority of the guests knew who was who, though the incognito of the more sedate onlookers and " wallflowers " like myself was oddly respected.

Then, making her entry to a sudden crescendo of the music and a long roll of the drums, a noise that somehow I couldn't help thinking would have gladdened the living heart of Barry Sullivan,* the once notable actor, had it accompanied his entrance in Scene 2 of Act 1 of " Hamlet "—the Countess, in her right hand a beribboned wand as tall as herself, stood before us.

* Barry Sullivan loved to make his stage entrances to noisy music—very often quite inappropriate. At the entrance mentioned by the narrator, Sullivan *strutted* on, his right hand at his breast, a look of grim defiance in his eyes (which was all thoroughly wrong) to the music of Hill's Wedding march !

She was, I think, the fairest-skinned woman I've ever seen, and, allowing for the heels of her dainty shoes and her coiffure, I judged her to be nearly six feet tall. There couldn't be two differing opinions about her beauty of face. She'd a glorious head of natural old-gold hair, piled high *à la* Pompadour, the blue, innocent and wondering eyes of a seraph, and a mouth that deserved a sonnet. She wasn't more than twenty-three. I've never beheld a more beautiful creature physically from that night to this, and I plead guilty to having lingered perhaps a shade too long upon some of the most famous beauties of Europe.

If you ask me what she wore . . . Ah ! . . . Imagine two generous yards and a half cut sheer from the faintest of silver morning mists, so diaphanous that it couldn't hide a naked silver birch a mile away ; imagine such a strip of material cut, given a shake, and then a fold or two by the cleverest court dressmaker among the fairies, then cunningly wrapped tight around the lady, with somewhere just one invisible stitch to hold the translucency together—and you have the Countess's " creation " of that night.

Naturally her gaze didn't rest upon me ; she didn't even glance in my direction, and, idiotic figure that I must have looked, somehow I felt grateful for the omission. She wore no jewels, and if the proverb is true about " beauty unadorned "—she shone the better without them. But don't think I'm trying to

picture an angel. Far from it. I've had some experience of women with angels' faces. The Countess was certainly beautiful, but, young as she was, she was bad.

Nevertheless, the lady continued to fascinate my eyes, as she did everyone's. With superb unselfconsciousness, unaffectedness and grace of movement she received and acknowledged unabashed the admiration a perfectly beautiful specimen of the human female can always compel—at any rate from the male sex; and had I not known her personal history I might have envied the men who bent over, and kissed, her shapely hand. The widow of a rich Germanised Polish Count (let us say), she had recently married again an untitled Artillery Captain, then at the Front, though it was common currency that both were bitterly regretting the alliance.

Prior to this marriage, a baker's dozen of insufficiently paid officers had fallen madly in love with the wealthy widow and clamoured for her hand in wedlock; rivals, meeting on her doorstep, reversing the politer order of things, had resorted to blows before words; duels had been fought in order to reduce their number to something like reasonable proportions, and when the news of the successful Artillery Captain's engagement to the Countess leaked out, he himself had been lucky indeed to reach the battlefield alive.

In any case, in her husband's absence not less than seven highly-placed but morally backsliding personages

paid clandestine court to her, if the gossiping whispers which I overheard had any claim to credence.

Names reached my ears ; and one of them, personified by a purple-faced gentleman in evening dress, who was said to hold an occult but important post in the Kreigministerium, strode into the assembly just before midnight, in company with an equally tall old man upon whose face of yellowed parchment Time (and Sin) had etched so many lines that in repose it looked more like a drawing than a living thing. Clad in a tight-fitting dark blue frock-coat, emerald green cravat and shepherd's plaid trousers, he leant heavily upon an ebony stick, and judging from the bellowing tones in which his companion addressed him, he was exasperatingly deaf.

I recognised both new-comers with real surprise. What on earth brought those aged gentlemen to that sort of show I couldn't fathom ; as it was, after greeting their hostess in the effusive manner Germanly reserved for a lady of eminence, they drew back and slowly retired up into the little gallery, where, a minute later, I could see little of their towering forms except their heads. Both wore serious faces (the parchment-visaged one must have worn a serious face every minute of his life from birth upwards), and both talked with animation, the purple-faced one in tones that travelled all over the cavern.

Their advent fell like a blight on the revelry, and I noticed the Countess palpably whispering instructions

into the grey elongated ear of an attendant, and presently the magic word " Abendessen " cleared the place.

Now, I couldn't eat or drink without removing my wretched hood (no doubt crippled Anni had anticipated and chuckled at the thought), and, although I'm not subject to headaches—have never been visited with one since I picked up and smoked an already half-smoked Turkish cigarette at the tender age of seven—I'd got a throbbing at my temples and a gaspiness of throat that made me feel still less inclined to join the boisterous throng in the supper-room, wherever it was. I'd been standing beneath the gallery when the central cavern began to empty, and thinking that my aloofness might attract notice I slipped into the tunnel directly behind me, meaning to wait a little until the coast became clear for an unceremonious exit into the fresh air.

The music had stopped, and hardly had I pushed aside the curtains draping the tunnel entrance before I became aware that the Personages on the gallery above me had not moved off with the rest, but were still conversing, one in a husky monotone and the other so loudly, not to say incautiously, that I could hear every word he uttered. The quiet speaker, it fell out, suffered from bouts of acute dyspepsia and didn't intend to beckon one forth by midnight supping ; and since the afflicted one was really a very Big Personage, his lesser and purple-faced friend, whatever the other man willed, had to agree.

What I overheard was hardly a dish for Intelligence, though as a matter of fact I hadn't planned to eavesdrop ; but presently, from one name uttered, the conversation took an amazing turn, and I placed my ear close against the join of the thick double curtains screening the opening and, without parting them, stood there listening.

You may or may not know that there dwelt in Germany during the War a coterie of revolutionary, Britain-hating East Indians. At first the German authorities treated them with the scant ceremony of bare toleration, but when the " stink apes," as the Germans call " coloured " people, came along with definite plans and personal offers to journey forth and assassinate certain Allied statesmen and leaders, they at least found listening ears. I'm not going into details, however, and I shall only say that it was a pretty serious plot which I overheard the old gentlemen on the gallery discussing, and that the centre-piece, whose name kept recurring in the conversation, was a certain hireling assassin I'll call Antonio Ferracino. This Ferracino was, I gathered, due to attend a " conference " in the German capital on the day following, and afterwards an experimental test of a newly-devised instrument of death, of infinitesimal dimensions, but of terrible effect.

Now, this precious and gratuitous information, but more particularly the name of the professional assassin, gave me something definite to follow up ; and I was

avidly straining my ears for more when the voice of the Countess suddenly put a full stop to the duologue.

" Now, you two," she called out cheekily from somewhere, and I involuntarily shrank back a pace or two : " Now, you two up there, giving away secrets of State—how do you know a spy is not listening to every word you say ? "

Golly ! as we used to say when we were kids, and at the same time were told by our parents that listeners never heard any good of themselves. I nearly jumped out of my costume. Discovered all alone in that accursed tunnel beneath the little gallery where the two Personages were chatting *arcades ambo* when I should have been supping merrily with the other guests ! It would need explaining, especially to the purple-faced gentleman, who in his younger days had held an important post on the Foreign Intelligence Staff. He would want to know quite a lot about Herr Belderbusch, retired shoemaker, of Munich. There was only one thing to do, and I lost no time in doing it. I crept down the short tunnel into the little " cave " at the end, and there extended my anatomy full-length on a gilt-framed couch, promising myself that I should be three times as drunk as the Rittmeister if I were found there and questioned It was the only thing to do.

The orchestra had begun to play again, but I could still hear the voices of the Countess and the purple-faced old gentleman, though I didn't hear what he

replied to the lady's spy suggestion, if he replied at all. But I did hear the lady invite the pair to a quiet little supper for the three of them in her private " peacock " room ; and finally, after the invitation had been translated into terms much more deferential than the Countess had used, and shouted into the deaf old boy's ear, he grumblingly and growlingly consented to risk his " damned indigestion " and be helped down the gallery steps—not by the purple-faced one but by the lady herself.

The voices died away : except for the muffled strains of the orchestra there was silence. I lay still another minute or so, and during that time I told myself again, and more positively, that the " entertainments "* which were to follow the repast should not draw me as a spectator. I'd seen all I wished to see, and heard more than I had expected to hear. By now the trio no doubt sat at the Countess's table in her " peacock " room.

I got up from the couch and in a few strides reached the tunnel's exit into the main cavern, where I found the lights had again been lowered to the former imitation twilight. I stole across the polished floor, passed through the exit door, whose position I had

* These entertainments (so I gathered from chats with other " lone " guests) were to be in the form of " native " dances given by young ladies who held no prudish foibles. I happen to know that such exhibitions, not infrequently followed by hysterical coma, were a feature in Berlin Society during the War.

from the first fixed in mind, pushed aside the tapestry beyond, and emerged into the vestibule of the mansion.

The monstrous negro reclined in a big armchair, sound asleep, his lips parted in a wide, glistening grin. Having wriggled out of my irksome costume, I folded it neatly flat, then awakened him with a shake on his shoulder, at which the corners of his mouth ran back to the lobes of his ears in a wider grin than ever. He jumped to his feet, murmured abject apologies, rubbed his eyes with his knuckles, accepted my gratuity as if such an item had never before come his way, then he waltzed attendance upon me as if I were his pet authentic Mumbo Jumbo.

I was glad to breathe fresh air again, and when I'd gained the pavement, having plastered my San Benito across my chest under my buttoned overcoat, I set my feet rapidly on the track for home.

That night a thoroughbred Scottish mist had strayed into the heart of Germany, one of those fine slow-falling mists that quickly soak the nap of one's coat and find the lining beneath ; for the time of year, too, it was bitterly cold : a miserable night, its melancholy enhanced by the wan lights of the street lamps whose globes looked like the faces of the dead. As there wasn't a sign of a taxi, I had to pad the hoof all the way ; and when I reached the Koppens' flat I found my underclothes dyed a " jazz " of red and yellow.

Never mind ! At the Countess's Reception I'd

learnt something worth all the discomfiture, not forgetting the price of the ticket of admission. But to clinch matters thoroughly I should have to get a good look at " Antonio Ferracino," because at a future date I might be called upon to identify the gentleman.

The difficulty was, with all Berlin to sift, where might I find him ? Besides, no time must be lost, for the test of the death weapon, I thought, would take place outside the capital, maybe, for the sake of secrecy, at a considerable distance from the city, and Ferracino might not return. Again, he might depart for good the following evening. Anyway, all I could rely upon was that he would attend a conference during the afternoon.

Now, our friends the Germans, as I've said before, are always thorough, often to their great credit, and sometimes to their own undoing ; and in their police system they are not seldom too thorough by half. So ! At the Berlin Head Police Office (Polizei Präsidium) in the Alexander Platz there is a special department called " Einwohner-Meldeamt " : and there you may obtain the address of any resident in, or visitor to, Berlin on payment of a trivial sum. So thorough is the system that the War was not allowed to disturb its working ; and in consequence the Einwohner-Meldeamt was still prepared to provide an enquirer with the address of *anyone* who happened to be in Berlin, be he War Lord, Government official, or a humble Ernst Belderbusch—provided no suspicion

attached to the enquirer. But in war-time it goes without saying there was an element of risk, if, as in my case, the enquirer was not a genuine inoffensive German citizen.

Nevertheless, to the Polizei Präsidium I betook myself that same morning, and in the office of the Einwohner-Meldeamt, on the third floor of the building, I filled up a form which, together with the equivalent of twopence-halfpenny, I handed to a shuffling Methuselah behind the counter.

The whiskered ancient dropped my nickel into a drawer, peered at the form, and shuffled away toward an array of shelves at the opposite end of the room, where he tugged out a huge loose-sheet index and began to flip over the pages, which I fancied were typewritten. Out of the corner of my eye I observed him narrowly, and presently he turned round, emitted a sort of growl to attract attention, and having got that attention, beckoned with a skinny finger another old man as fossilised as himself, whereupon the pair, with much wagging of white beards and dumb show of wasted fingers, held a pow-wow together, and I smelt trouble. I may say that I was immensely relieved when Methuselah Number One, instead of summoning assistance (for whatever purpose), returned toward me, spectacles on forehead—just the fossilised creature of routine that he was.

" The address cannot be given to you," he croaked. Then, the matter ended as far as he was concerned,

Methuselah offered his ministrations to another enquirer, and I marched out into the street, satisfied that Antonio Ferracino *had* arrived and had not yet *left* Berlin. Half an hour later I slipped into a public telephone-box and rang up that same Einwohner-Meldeamt.

On gaining my " call," peremptorily, but in a high-pitched voice I gave my name, " Antonio Ferracino," and flavouring my German with a rich foreign accent I demanded to speak at once with the officer-in-charge. The name—or the bluff—acted like magic, and the conversation that ensued ran like this :

Said I severely : " To my great annoyance I have been visited at the Esplanade Hotel by a woman who stated that she obtained my address from your office. Tell me, please, how such colossal stupidity came to be brought about ? "

From the other end came a growl of surprise ; then : " The Esplanade Hotel, Herr Ferracino ?—but I myself, only this morning early, received special instructions from the Kreigministerium about you——"

" Then you will know," I cut in testily, " that with official sanction I have a special apartment allotted to me in the Esplanade Hotel."

" Nein, Herr Ferracino, I did not know it, I assure you. We have no address of yours except the rooms at the ' Adlon '—those officially engaged for you. I myself dictated the entry in our register. You may take it from me that no one here has given a

woman your special address at the Esplanade Hotel——"

" Woman ! " I snapped. " I did not say a woman ; I said a man."

" Ach ! so, Herr Ferracino I misunderstood you. But if you have been annoyed I suggest that you ring up the police, number——"

" Ach ! it doesn't matter as much as that," I interrupted. " I'm sorry to have troubled you. May I, however, ask you to treat this communication in strict confidence ? " I added cautiously.

" Natürlich ! With pleasure," came the accommodating reply. . . . And that was that.

I now made hurried tracks to the " Adlon," and there met with a piece of good luck which may have saved me a prolonged and risky dawdling about. Besides the chief door-keeper (and he was something to go on with), I spotted two unmistakable detectives the moment I stepped inside the glittering entrance hall ; but I spotted something else, too.

The luncheon-room had not yet opened, but a bunch of seven or eight military officers in uniform stood near the glass doors, evidently on the look-out for someone or other to join them before entering. Hardly had I, with affected weariness, fallen into the one unoccupied chair in the lounge before a lift descended, and out of it stalked no less a personage than the purple-faced gentleman of the Countess's Reception. On this occasion, also, he was accompanied by a man in a tight-

fitting dark blue frock-coat ; but this time his companion was a diminutive dapper little chap barely five feet high, whom I observed to be by no means deaf, dumb, blind or doddery ; and I didn't need telling that the little man trotting nimbly by the side of the purple-faced one was—Antonio Ferracino.

I daresay that you expected him to be an Indian. So did I ; but Antonio Ferracino was no more Indian than I am ; and though his face and hands were tinted a darker shade than his geographical origin warranted, I knew his nationality at first glance.

And I had a pretty good notion, even then, that Antonio Ferracino had insisted on his visit to Berlin being kept darker than his complexion, lest an unfortunate meeting with his supposed fellow-countrymen, the would-be assassins, might clean bowl him, first ball.

At all events, Antonio spoofed the Germans to some tune, and as the result of his self-appointed mission to Berlin he subsequently succeeded in bringing to London highly desirable information, which dotted every single *i* and crossed every single *t* of my own report concerning the malcontent East Indians' precious plot.

And let me add that " Antonio Ferracino " was a Japanese.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH A CAPTAIN BEHRENS COMES FACE TO FACE WITH A TYPE OF GERMAN THAT HE HAD SOME REASON TO BELIEVE EXTINCT

At a sudden gentle tapping on his bedroom door, a tapping unheralded by footsteps, Captain Tybor Behrens, of the 154th Regiment of Foot, Imperial German Army, started slightly and tilted his ear in the direction of the sound. For a tapping on his door at a quarter to two of a drear January night in Berlin was not lightly to be disregarded.

Who was it ?

Hardly a man's tapping, unless it were purposely disguised ; hardly the tapping of authority in the physical buttoned-up form of the Law. Who, then, was it ?

The tapping was repeated, the same number of taps—five.

After a night of it at a " verboten " dance-hall off the Joachimsthalerstrasse, Behrens, loth to begin the fag of undressing, lay back in a wicker lounge chair puffing a Turkish cigarette. Now, at the second tapping, he pressed out his cigarette on the ash-tray

at his elbow, rose leisurely to his feet, and straightened himself in his grey-green uniform ; then he flicked a speck or two of ash from the crease in the bend of his elbow, strode softly to the wardrobe, snatched a look at his shining duplicate in the long mirror, gave his half-grown moustache an upward smear at each end, and stepping to the door, drew it frankly wide open—wide open, because Behrens was conscious that he had nothing to conceal (outwardly, at any rate), and because the action, trivial in itself, was calculated to give an innocent first impression.

He beheld a woman.

As tall as Behrens himself, and almost as self-assured, she wore a cloak of ermine over an evening gown, and a head-wrap of black brocade had fallen from her dull bronze hair. A strikingly handsome woman, her features were of that pronounced type which ever add mischievously a year or two—sometimes more—to the rest of the face. . . . Happy indeed are women born with unobtrusive noses and unintruding chins, for, other things being equal, Time seems to deal more leniently with them.

Behrens noticed that she was unusually pale beneath the thin cloud of powder upon her face, and as his eyes met hers, her closed hand was uplifted as though she had been about to tap on the door again. At the Captain's low-pitched ejaculation she still held it poised, but a quick opening of the fingers, as well as a slight pursing of the lips, warned him to be discreet.

" You must please excuse me, Captain Behrens, but except yourself there is no other man in the Pension——" she began to explain quietly and with a shortage of breath.

Behrens bowed, and wondered what was coming.

" I want your help——"

" It is yours, Baroness, for the asking," interposed Behrens, with another bow.

" I naturally came to you," the lady continued, lowering her voice to a whisper and casting an apprehensive glance over her shoulder along the dark corridor. Now with a backward wave of her hand, as if to warn him there might be listening ears within the adjacent rooms, she turned away toward the head of the staircase and noiselessly began to descend, without even a glance to learn if he were following.

Behrens hesitated only a second; then, having first cautiously shut his door, he, too, descended the pretentiously designed but thinly carpeted staircase, sliding one hand down the fluted banister rail until he touched the newel on the ground-floor hall.

Here it was pitch dark, but a whispered " This way " from the white-clad, dimly visible figure ahead guided him across the tiled flooring, past the street entrance with its closed double door, then along a short passage into a small apartment which he knew was set apart as the combined office and private sitting-room of Frau Teller, the stout proprietress of the Pension.

Immediately he entered, the door was closed behind

him ; the next moment a crimson-shaded light in the ceiling coloured the chill room, and almost before her thumb fell from the switch the Baroness, standing erect with her back to the door, began to speak in low and measured tones :

" Captain Behrens, I hope first that you have forgiven me for suddenly deserting you at the dance——"

" There is nothing to forgive, Baroness——"

" And that you will pardon my troubling you at this hour of the night ; but I have something to ask you—something which I must beg of you to keep to yourself."

" I think you may take my silence for granted," answered Behrens, infusing a cadence into the words which sought to warn the lady that the speaker wished to hear no secret overstepping the borderline of the conventions. And here it may be stated in explanation of the Captain's attitude that the Baroness (as he rightly surmised) was one of those not by any means rare women who habitually make sudden and unaccountable friendships, preferring, it would seem, a periodic bonfire of the tender emotions to any enduring and modest flame. Beyond this, the lady was more than inclined to garrulity, so much so that Behrens, as he looked at her white-clad figure, somehow could not help recalling the image of Plutarch's eagle-fearing geese, who flew over Mount Zanrus each holding a stone in its mouth so that their gabbling should not betray themselves to the enemy !

" Captain Behrens," she began again, " please believe that what I am going to say is of the highest importance——"

He nodded—a trifle impatiently, if the truth be told.

" And I implicitly trust you, because you are a *gentleman.*" (She used the English word, which for long has been doing its best to make itself at home in the German language.)

He nodded again, and fidgeted slightly with one foot.

" I know that my confidence will not be misplaced, that you will not breathe a word."

The little " Mphm ! " sounded behind his tightly-closed lips was in reality a peremptory request for her to get on with her story ; and casting off the head-piece from her shoulders, she sat down on the canopied sofa, a cumbrous piece of furniture, that, with Frau Teller's grotesquely-carved writing-bureau, monopolised all the wall of the room facing the one heavily-curtained window. Then, glancing up at him, she patted the sofa at her side. He sat down, and the Baroness placed an over-jewelled hand on his sleeve, saying at the same moment :

" Captain Behrens, I suppose you know General von Blancke, at least by name ? "

" I do—by name," replied Behrens, shewing no surprise, though the mere mention of the name, for reasons best known to himself, came like a thump on his chest from an unseen hand.

" You have never met the General ? "

" No. I have never had that shining honour," returned the Captain, who now intended to exhibit no further sign of impatience.

The lady remained silent for a few audible ticks of the clock, a look about her eyes, a raising of her underlids telling him of her struggle to arrange in sequence what she wished to say—no easy task for women, who rarely finish even a thought before beginning the sentence which is to convey it. At length she spoke, drew her hand away from his sleeve, and turned her far shoulder a little more toward him.

" The General," she proceeded, " I must emphasise, in his private capacity as well as in his official, is a man of the most irreproachable honour. With him the word ' honour ' is not the shibboleth we present-day non-moral Germans secretly regard it. The General belongs to the past—is considered old-fashioned, out of date, except in his professional capacity——"

The Captain smiled, a little incredulously ; for " honour " he may have thought a dubious attribute to stress, in the General's official capacity at least, since of all branches of the Service the one he represented called for little exercise of the virtue. But he said nothing, and the lady ran rapidly on :

" Old-fashioned he may be—he believes in the Divine Right of Kings !—but of his own personal honour there is no question. I happen to know, perhaps to

my sorrow. Twenty years ago a nice point of honour separated him from his wife—for nothing, really ; but there it was. A breach of personal honour the General sternly looks upon as unforgivable. Strange as it may sound, he has English ideals, of the lofty unattainable sort. He is English in his ludicrous conviction that the prestige of Germany should be founded, not on the might of the State but upon the honour of the individual ! And I wish you to mark this, Captain Behrens," raising her hand dramatically : " to General von Blancke a breach of personal honour, especially by an officer, is expiable only with death—death at the hands of an opponent ; by the sentence of the tribunal appointed ; or self-inflicted."

Behrens smiled again, a little sarcastically.

" Baroness," he observed, surmising that, so far, she was only floundering in a preface to her story proper, " my dear Baroness, believe me, I fully realise all you say concerning the General ; but forgive my mentioning it "—he threw a glance at the hanging, fretwork-framed clock—" at this hour, and in these circumstances——"

" Yes, I am sorry, Captain, but I am coming to the point," she persisted. " I have told you only what is necessary to explain what I have yet to say. Of course, you observed the youngster for whom I abruptly deserted you at the dance an hour ago ? "

" I fancy no one present failed to observe him," replied Behrens dryly. " I fancy, too, that there will

be further observations, of another sort, elsewhere. I never saw anyone so distressingly drunk—and in a crack regiment, too, if I mistake not."

" There is an excuse for the boy, Captain Behrens."

" No doubt. There is always an excuse to be found for drunkenness ; especially by the drunkard himself."

" But this is only a boy," urged the lady, " not yet twenty-two. Already he has been wounded five times, twice badly ; and he is the last surviving son of General von Blancke."

" Then, Baroness, the fact that the gods have overlooked him speaks for itself, and the General has my sympathy."

" I also am sorry for the General, for I have never lost my respect for him ; but who am I to condemn my own son, who, God be thanked, would not have known his mother, even had he been in his right senses."

" Baroness ! "

Accustomed though he was to a rigorous control of his feelings, Captain Behrens sprang to his feet ; but her quiet, though intense, " Please, Captain Behrens, please ! " and the beseeching look in her eyes made him sit down again, although with manifest reluctance. He felt " guilty," almost as if he had been caught prying into the lady's boudoir.

" Yes, Captain Behrens," the Baroness went on, ignoring the interruption, " I, whom you and others know as the Baroness von Graevner, living now

obscurely in a second-rate pension—I was formerly the wife of General von Blancke. Rudolf is my son. But perhaps you may remember me under another name—Teresa Rheinll." *

" Baroness," again protested Behrens, " may I ask how all this concerns me, virtually a stranger to you, a mere temporary officer, and a ' provincial,' totally ignorant of Society and its affairs ? "

" I am about to tell you how all this concerns you, Captain," she replied. " It is not on account of Rudolf's deplorable condition that I beg your aid. It is a much graver trouble. I did not know it was so grave when I first went up to him in the dance hall. Then I wished merely to get him away from the vile foreign-looking woman in scarlet you no doubt observed forcing her attentions upon him."

" She was pretty evil-looking—— "

" And old enough to be the boy's grandmother—hateful enough for the vices themselves to shrink from," returned the Baroness angrily.

Behrens smiled reflectively. " Our vices leave us only when they tire of us ; our virtues, when we tire of them," he said quietly. It was not wholly sententious ; his opinion of, and attitude toward, the Baroness had undergone a decided change during the last few

* Teresa Rheinll : a lady at one time notorious in the first circle of Berlin Society. It seems necessary to re-state here that the names of persons mentioned in this narrative are fictitious.

minutes. Sentimental ?—if you will . . . but the Baroness was speaking :

" That woman it was who was responsible for the boy's condition."

" What was her motive ? "

" Robbery—not of money, but of papers he carried. I am sure of it."

" What sort of papers ? "

" State papers. I can say no more, except that they are secret."

" *Himmelherrgottdonnerwetter !* The boy—an officer —carried secret papers of State into a questionable dance hall ? Excuse me, it is incredible ! "

" But it is true. He told me he had the papers on him. Naturally I got him out of the den at once—brought him here in his father's limousine, which is at our door now."

" And the boy ? "

" Lies helpless, unconscious, on the drawing-room sofa."

" ' A very nice kettle of fish,' as the English say. You want me to see him ? "

" Oh no, thank you. I am woman of the world enough to know what to do for Rudolf. No—I want you to go to his father at once."

Almost Captain Behrens whistled. Surprises, shocks were succeeding one another like the popping of unexpected corks. " Baroness—you ask much of me," he gasped.

" Only what I know you will do willingly, Captain," she replied with an air of conviction that further astounded him. " Rudolf ought to have left Berlin at ten to-night sharp. Instead, he has perpetrated this madness. Thank heaven I was in time——"

" He still has the papers ? "

" No ; I have—I have taken them from him. So you see now, Captain, the reason why I disturbed you at such an hour. I knew you wouldn't refuse me. God knows, the fate of our armies may rest upon the prompt delivery of the things. That is sufficient for you, a German soldier. But to me—isn't my boy's whole career at stake ? "

" But had not we better——" began Behrens.

" It may be hours before my son is himself again," the Baroness ran on agitatedly, " and every minute counts. By now he should be well on his journey. For the General, the fact that Rudolf should have delayed at all is enough. I know the General. Even if Rudolf were to recover now—at once—if he encountered his father to-night it would mean a tragedy : he would find a pistol and shoot his—my—son dead on the spot."

" Shoot him ! Like that, is he ? " Behrens' eyebrows went up ; and believing the woman made his position the more awkward. . . . " But, my dear Baroness," he urged, " what if the General says to me, ' Take me to my son instantly ' ? What if he questions the chauffeur, who you say is outside ? "

" Captain Behrens, do you not realise that for my

son's life I am gambling on a chance ? " cried the Baroness, wringing her hands. " I must gain time for him ; my presence here may keep the General away —*if*, and only if, the General has the papers back. You must tell General von Blancke the truth."

Again Behrens' eyebrows went up. You see, putting the drunken young gentleman on one side, as an officer in the Imperial German Army he, Behrens, couldn't —daren't refuse to take the papers back to old von Blancke !

" I hope that the General is not apoplectically inclined." He laughed uncomfortably, not sure whether he uttered the remark in jest or in earnest.

The Baroness took him seriously. " On the contrary," she retorted, " he is the quietest, the healthiest of men. You have only to state the facts in as few words as possible. In serious affairs he rarely says one word that isn't necessary. Tell him the strict truth. I know that you have tact—what is it but good taste in action ? "

Behrens looked at her, again struck by the marked change in the woman at his side, a woman whom, during a week's acquaintanceship, he had apparently much underrated. Teresa Rheinll ! . . . he better understood why Berlin society at one time had raved about her, if the Teresa Rheinll of that period was like the Teresa of this.

" Where are these precious papers ? " he asked, a trifle gruffly, rising to his feet.

She too rose, and quickly dipping a hand into a deep inside pocket of her ermine robe, pulled out a long narrow wallet of red morocco leather, which the Captain noticed bore an embossed gold monogram on the flap.

" And what is the destination of the things ? " he added.

" I have no idea—and the boy couldn't tell me. They are in sealed envelopes, unaddressed, otherwise I should have gone along in the limousine with my son and delivered them, whatever their destination."

She thrust the wallet into Behrens' outstretched hand. He drew out two envelopes and narrowed his eyes over the seals on their flaps. Then he replaced the envelopes in the wallet, undid a button of his tunic and thrust the thing inside. Since it was inevitable, the sooner this unpalatable job was done the better. The Baroness evidently thought the same, for by now she was at the door ; he hastened to open it, and after a little surprised bow of acknowledgment she switched off the light. He followed her along the passage and across the hall to the inner door of the vestibule, which he heard her unfastening.

It seemed she expected him to sally forth just as he was, bareheaded and without a greatcoat ; but as he groped his way into the vestibule he felt her two hands press the ermine robe firmly upon his shoulders ; and holding this novel military pelisse together at his chin, Captain Behrens made his way out into the street.

Snow was falling ; it came along silently, bewilderingly, almost on the level, like an interminable army of virgin white butterflies in their peculiar hesitating, reeling and floppy flight. The wind, though light in force, was unexpectedly stinging. Behrens glanced to right and left ; through the white flying mass he could barely make out a street lamp twenty feet away from him on his right. To that lamp he marched ; then, seeing no car, he retraced his steps, squeakily, as now and again his foot slipped backward, giving a sound like the tearing of silk. He passed the dark closed door of Frau Teller's pension, and about the length of a quoit-pitch beyond he came upon the limousine, whose lights were out. At first glance it seemed but the skeleton of a car, for the snow had hidden the top of it and the side, only here and there a touch of the window-frames remaining visible. Something, however, stirred within it ; a dash-lamp flared, and a figure in murky grey jumped out—the chauffeur, or *kraftwagenfuhrer* (power-wagon driver) as he was called by the Germans at that period, owing to their detestation of everything French.

"I want you to drive me as quickly as you can through this stuff to the General's residence," said the Captain. "You have all the streets to yourself."

"I shall be very pleased, sir," replied the man, betraying no surprise at the oddly-caparisoned figure in front of him. "May I ask if the Lieutenant is better,

sir ? " he enquired earnestly, after the right length of pause.

" I cannot say. The Bar—I mean the lady—you know her ? "

" Ach ! Yes, sir. Who does not ? " The man smiled broadly, good-humouredly ; but in the smile Behrens perceived no trace of inward comment nor criticism. If anything, the Captain was inclined to interpret the expression as prompted by " respect " simply ; but it was plain that when the man shut the door slowly upon him he was itching to say something else, but hesitated to do so.

" Do you wish to say anything further ? " the Captain asked.

" Only that—well, I see that you are an officer, sir, but I was going to say—if you will pardon me, sir—that if you intend to see the General, sir, and do see him, sir, you might recollect, sir, that the Lieutenant is only young, sir, very young, sir. . . . You see, I am very proud of him, sir ; everybody is, sir, if I may be allowed to say so, sir."

Behrens nodded. " I will remember what you say," he returned. " Hurry along, please." The chauffeur then performed with the usual German alacrity those stereotyped servile " jerks " that would have sent the late William Morris (who once declared that no man is fit to be another man's master) into paroxysms of the most ungovernable fury, after which he quickly dived into his cabin, and simultaneously the headlights flared

out upon a writhing curtain of snowflakes, the engine hummed, the dashlamp went out, and the ghostly limousine glided off along the utterly deserted Dresdenerstrasse. Captain Behrens snuggled himself comfortably into the offside corner of the deep rear seats, fired a cigarette, and with the Baroness's cloak pulled lightly round him, did his very damnedest to think of absolutely nothing at all.

In this effort he didn't succeed particularly well, for the leather wallet within his tunic began to draw him with all the magnetic attraction the mysterious sealed box exerted upon poor Pandora. Thus intrigued, amid the bewildering snowfall of the night, he omitted to observe the direction in which he was being whirled, and likewise the time that elapsed before the car pulled up in front of a double bay-windowed house, faced on the opposite side of the road by tall snow-shrouded railings with large oval headpieces that suggested a row of gaping spectres.

As, puzzled, he peered forth at the uninviting habitation, the murky white-spotted figure of the chauffeur suddenly blocked his view, and Captain Behrens, flinging backward the fur robe, sprang out of the limousine, at whose open door the chauffeur again repeated his orthodox antics at the sight of the " King's Coat." Equally obedient to military convention, the Captain barked a " Wait, please ! " and, though he would have gladly given a hundred twenty-mark gold pieces rather than approach the portals of the building,

which resembled a gigantic sentry-box, he nevertheless martially ascended the few broad steps, and, fairly sheltered from the elements, shiveringly pressed the bell.

From the basement, with the sonorousness of a fire-alarm, a gong responded as if in frenzied protest. After its silence, an æon appeared to pass, without any result. . . More or less boldly the Captain rang again. Another interminable silence followed. Behrens grew considerably heartened : if he could make no one hear —he could make no one hear ; and the fact might furnish a welcome finish to a nocturnal adventure for which he had little relish. He would ring just once more, and then, if the button were not pretty smartly answered—a word to the chauffeur, and he would be on his way back to the pension with no mere excuse, but a sound reason for the failure of his mission ; for, be it borne in mind, the subject of the breathless adventures herein narrated is no convenient and faultless hero of fiction, but a man of ordinary flesh and blood, whose little inconsistencies must be set down with the rest.

The Captain rang a third time, a ring so little meant that it might have been regarded as unworthy of notice by the youngest mice of the establishment. Allowing, perhaps, a futile fifteen seconds to go by, he was on the point of turning on his heel when a brilliant light suffused the glass of the fanlight above him. He heard a bolt drawn back, then another one. He

swung round again; departure, now, was impossible.

The door opened—an eighth of an inch at a time—just wide enough to reveal a dwarfish creature with hairless face, who scowled at the intruder from beneath a candle-snuffer nightcap.

" I want to see General von Blancke," demanded Behrens, emboldened a little by the sight of the diminutive creature.

" Ach ! the devil take it, his Excellency is sleeping," angrily piped the old man in a toothless lisp. " You must have important business—yes ?—to come to him in the middle of his night's repose ? But I must tell you that you cannot see him ; no, not on any account can you see his Excellency." The old man shivered, gasped and blinked at the inrush of icy air that must have cut him like a frozen scythe, and clutched the collar of his blue flannelette nightgown, the nether portion of which article of attire had been ineffectually tucked into trousers that presently threatened to descend to his ankles.

" Tell the General that Captain Behrens desires to see him on a matter of great urgency," reiterated the Captain. " And please be quick about it."

"Ach ! but devil take it, it is impossible, Captain, at this hour of the night, impossible," protested the sleepy-eyed old man quickly on one falsetto note. " You could not see him were you the Kaiser himself——"

" But I tell you I must see the General. It is about

his son Rudolf that I have come," said Behrens, raising his voice.

" That makes no matter—not at all. Lieutenant Rudolf himself, devil take it, could not see his father at this time of night. *Ughreu !* "—the little man shivered again with deliberate exaggeration—" *Ughreu !* devil take it, I shall get my infernal death. You may leave a message—yes ; but I would not wake the General for all the gold of an English robber lord." And as a signal of his irrevocable determination he shut his eyes, seemed to fasten up his face as if it were a miniature knapsack, and began slowly to close the ponderous door.

At this point of the fugue the voice of the chauffeur burst in. " Why do not you admit the Captain, and do as you are told ? " he shouted authoritatively from his driving-seat, adding a mysterious threat which Behrens failed to catch, though it presumably had such effect upon the old curmudgeon that he opened wide his eyes, then his face, and then the door. Captain Behrens kicked the snow from his shoes and entered.

With a dilatoriness that appeared in marked contrast to the rapidity of his tongue, the grotesque figure ushered Behrens along a wide hall which exhibited an array of armoured figures standing on pedestals, and other silent reminders of men's eternal and bloodthirsty love for one another, into an imposing study, panelled and furnished in dark walnut, and from whose plain white ceiling a sparkling electrolier of silver depended.

The room was still warm, and within it an odour of cigarette smoke, tinged with that of wine or spirits, lingered so pleasantly and sociably, that for a brief moment Behrens harboured the hallucination that a cordial welcome was about to be extended to him.

The human oddity, with a jerk of the hand and a screw of the eye, mutely asked him to be seated, and on the Captain's equally wordless intimation that he preferred to stand, the familiar, not to say insolent old retainer, after running a black little eye around the ceiling and shaking two loose fingers and a thumb together in an audible click, exclaimed: " Devil take it ! What name did you say I should tell the General?"

" Never mind the name—say an officer desires to see him on urgent business, and that the officer regrets, of course, to disturb the General," barked Behrens, rapidly losing his temper.

" You are sure, sir, that you *must* see the General to-night ? " the oddity annoyingly persisted, his face bent downward, and looking over an imaginary pair of spectacles. " You are sure, sir ? Because, devil take it——"

" Go and wake your master," commanded Behrens loudly, " unless you wish me to wake him myself."

With a conciliatory smile, a shrug of the shoulders, half a bow, and a quarter of a salute, the oddity backed out of the room and shut the door without a sound.

At once the mere solidity of the room seemed to increase the Captain's apprehension. If the chauffeur hadn't

been awaiting him with the General's limousine at the front door, the chances are that Behrens would have flung the confounded wallet on the large bare table in front of him and stolen " out at the portal," like the ghost of Hamlet's father, before the General had time to make his appearance. Truly there are encounters where men may meet on a friendly footing that require ten times more courage than a cavalry charge.

By now the Captain had shifted his point of view a good deal, and could not understand why really he had undertaken such a foolhardy mission, about whose attendant risk there could be no question, unless he pleaded guilty to the cajolement of a woman's eyes, to a folly—call it what you will—that seemed inimical to every dictate of common sense and even to the dictates of duty. Next, he realised again that he dared not have chanced the possible consequences of a definite refusal to carry the papers to the General. And, then, as he stood with his back to an escritoire that rested underneath a tall narrow bookcase, his excogitations were brought to a sudden halt by the General himself.

The door had been flung open so violently that it struck the rubber guard fixed in the floor a foot from the panelling, and rebounded quiveringly almost in the General's face.

The General—it could be no one else—heedless of the door, took two paces forward and stopped dead, his clenched fists at his sides, the rigidity of his whole towering frame conveying electrically to the Captain

the suppressed ire of a consciously important personage unjustifiably and outrageously dragged from his bed. At the General's rear Behrens caught a glimpse of a cringing form—that of the oddity, who had doffed his night-cap and donned a jacket of vermilion livery, displaying now an ivory scalp as hairless as the face below it. Stealthily the cringing little creature, a grim leer upon his wide, shut mouth, closed the door behind his master as silently as he had closed it before.

The General, * who was attired in a pearl-grey frogged dressing-gown with light green silk facings and light green cord girdle, tied, the Captain noticed, in a careful bow at his left side, darted a glance at his unseasonable visitor, which had the luminosity of lightning; and in those eyes, pale as polished silver, Behrens observed another attribute: they were the most worldly-wise eyes he had ever faced. In their transparent depths he saw at once that the General was reading him —with ease; and moreover (or was it the Captain's guilty conscience ?) his reading seemed to be a true one. It was as if a judge of a Criminal Court had just been handed a list of " previous convictions " of the prisoner in the dock and had then transferred and fixed his enlightened gaze upon the victim, who in that gaze saw clearly foreshadowed his own fate. No wonder, then, if the younger man momentarily quailed and was slightly awkward in coming to the correct salute.

* Further personal description of the General is purposely omitted.

" Excellency "—Behrens faltered a little—" I have to apologise—— "

" Your name ? " cut in the General, whose voice, though not loud, filled the room like a deep note from an organ.

" Tybor Behrens—Captain."

" Attached ? "

" On leave, General."

" I said—attached ? "

" 154th Regiment."

" Then, Captain Behrens, 154th Regiment, on leave, your business, please."

" Excellency," proceeded Behrens, " my business here is none of my seeking. To yourself it is both urgent and personal ; to me a task of some delicacy, in which I shall need your forbearance."

" Leave me to judge of that. Proceed—and be brief."

" I am staying at a pension in the Dresdenerstrasse," continued the Captain, assuming the level intonation of an officer giving evidence at a court-martial. " At or about a quarter to two this morning a lady summoned me downstairs——"

" Her name ? "

" The Baroness von Graevner."

" Proceed, Captain Behrens," said von Blancke coldly. He had stood perfectly still ; now he thrust his hands into the side pockets of his dressing-gown, his pale face immobile as a death mask.

" The Baroness—whom I know but casually—handed me this, and begged me to deliver it to you without delay. I came here in your own limousine. It waits outside." As he spoke, Captain Behrens extracted from his tunic the wallet, which he held out to General von Blancke.

Without the faintest sign of recognition or surprise the General took the wallet, unfastened it with uneager, deliberate fingers and looked inside. He half drew out an envelope, then slowly pushing it back again, asked : " You have examined these, Captain Behrens ? "

" No, sir, I have not."

" You know something about the contents ? "

" I know nothing at all about the contents, sir."

" Why, then, do you speak of urgency ? "

" I was told by the Baroness that the matter was extremely urgent. That is all."

" What precisely were you told ? "

" That the wallet contained important papers from yourself, which ought to have left Berlin at ten o'clock this night."

" You know no more ? "

" Of the contents of the wallet I beg you to believe I am entirely ignorant, sir," retorted Behrens, not without a show of indignation.

With methodical care the General refastened the flap of the thing, then holding it like a salver between fingers and thumbs, with his elbows against his sides, he demanded :

" From whom did the Baroness von Graevner obtain this ? "

" She stated that she took it from Lieutenant Rudolf von Blancke."

" At what time ? "

" Between half-past twelve and a quarter-past one, I should say, sir."

" Did the Baroness von Graevner explain the theft ? "

" Not theft——"

" Answer my question."

" She explained why she took it from the Lieutenant."

" Pass on that explanation to me, Captain Behrens, without ambiguity or reservation."

" Being alarmed by something which he had told her, the Baroness took the wallet from Lieutenant Rudolf von Blancke because he was in a condition of—insensibility."

" Insensibility ! Will you have the goodness to use precise terms instead of generalities ? "

" The Lieutenant was intoxicated, sir."

Still the General's face remained immobile as a mask.

" You personally substantiate that accusation ? "

The Captain paused a second or two before replying. " Not unless the intoxicated man in whose company I saw the Baroness at a dance hall off the Joachimsthalerstrasse shortly after midnight was Lieutenant von Blancke," he answered.

" Captain Behrens, you will consider yourself under arrest."

The phrase was uttered quietly, more quietly than the General had hitherto spoken.

Instantly at the word " arrest " Behrens saluted, then stood to attention. His mouth dried ; there was a hissing sound in his ears, rather like that which a receding wave must leave on the red-cindered shore of Hades.

He essayed to speak, and uttered only two incoherent words. He swallowed, and tried again.

" To whom shall I report, General ? " he managed to get out.

" You are aware of the regulations concerning officers and dance halls ? " continued von Blancke, ignoring the question.

" I am, sir. May I say——"

" Be quiet, sir. And that you have committed a breach of those regulations ? "

" I admit it, General."

" Very well. Then let me tell you that I shall take action against that breach in due course."

" I trust you will reconsider your decision, sir, in the circumstances——"

" Silence, sir. . . . Where is my son, Lieutenant Rudolf von Blancke ? "

" I was given to understand, General, that he is still with the Baroness von Graevner at the private pension of Frau Teller, Dresdenerstrasse, Number —. The Baroness took him there in your limousine, because——"

"I did not ask for reasons, Captain Behrens," cut in the General sharply. "You say you were 'given to understand.' Explain."

"I cannot be more definite, sir. I did not see Lieutenant Rudolf von Blancke at the pension."

"You took the word of this Baroness ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why ?"

"Because I had no reason to doubt her. General," the Captain went on, "believe me, I deplore this intrusion upon your private affairs, but the Baroness forced upon me confidences I did not desire ; she was deeply distressed. She appealed to me first as a mother, but not less, I think, from a fervent desire to shield the honour of a great name and the personal honour of one whom she holds in the highest respect. Frankly, her appeal touched—convinced me. and I did not want to waste time in seeing the Lieutenant. The instant return of the papers to you in person seemed my clear and immediate duty."

General von Blancke gave no sign that he approved or disapproved. One would have imagined, indeed, that he had not been listening, but was intent upon a problem foreign to the matter in hand and willing to let the other man go on talking until he had solved the problem in being.

"Captain Behrens," said the General abruptly, "I take you to be a man of honour." And though the

words certainly could not be construed as a question, the Captain preferred to treat them as one and saluted, adding with an inflection that was intended to suggest, in the only way diplomatically possible, the natural chagrin of a subordinate in such a position, " I trust so, General."

The General was silent, his eyes fixed on Behrens' ; and Behrens was guilty of a keen regret that he had not a younger, a much younger man to deal with. But the General was older perhaps than his years ; his eyes were rimmed with the *arcus senilis*, and here and there in an otherwise firm and un-aged voice a little unpreventable quaver issued its plaintive appeal, making the notion of violence unthinkable. . .

Presently the old man spoke again.

" I think you understand me, Captain Behrens," he said, his voice softening a perceptible shade, " and I take you at your word—hold you to that word. One moment, please "—as Behrens essayed to speak. " For the time being you may consider yourself released from arrest, whilst detailed for interim duty, on the ordinary parole of an officer.—That goes without saying. But there is a personal side to the duty I desire you to perform. My military reputation apart, my own personal honour is involved. My son has failed me. You, I am sure, will not do so. Now, Captain Behrens, in my son's stead I wish you to proceed to Vienna as my special courier. There you will yourself hand this wallet—which I shall seal—to the person whose name

I am going to write down for you. That duty accomplished, you will at once return here to me with his reply. And on both journeys you will waste not one minute. I shall myself write you a pass, give you full written authority, and you will catch the earliest train from the Anhalter Bahnhof. There should be one I used last week—at seven o'clock—four hours hence; but you must make sure at the station before you take a wink of sleep. If there is no train at seven or thereabouts, my car is at your disposal, and my man, for the next twenty-four hours if need be—not longer."

The General advanced toward the escritoire. Behrens stepped aside, and regarding the old man's gaunt expanse of back now presented to him, twisted and twiddled the leather wallet which, for a second time that night, had been thrust into his unwilling hands.

Again he was seized by a wild impulse to get away from the place, to dash across the room, and out into the street—away. . . If he stayed in the General's presence a few seconds longer he was in mortal fear that he would remain tongue-tied and silent, and thus pledge himself in honour bound to carry out the General's behest. The least Quixotic of men, an hour or so ago Behrens would have given ten years of his life for the opportunity now awaiting him. He had, indeed, jeered at himself, dubbed himself traitor to his country for letting slip the chance of a look at the contents of the wallet before returning them to the General. He was clever enough to have done it without leaving a

trace of the act. But something Quixotic had won then ; now the battle had to be fought afresh.

As a matter of fact, Behrens was given barely fifteen seconds in which to make a decision ; and in that brief space he could make none. General von Blancke had jerked open the escritoire top, letting down the hinged flap with a bang ; and the Captain, starting as if a pistol had been fired, uttered an all-too-faltering : " General——" There he stopped short ; but he well knew that by that one word he had burnt his boats.

Von Blancke slewed round in his chair. " You spoke, Captain Behrens ? "

There ensued an awkward silence, in which Behrens heard the old man breathing.

" General—I cannot undertake your errand."

There, it was out !—and with a bravado born of desperation he pulled himself together to meet the diamond-drill gaze of the General, who was now on his feet.

" What cannot you do, Captain Behrens ? " No anger, no surprise, just a deadly terrifying tonelessness. It robbed Behrens of his bravado, and made him feel a fool.

" I beg of you to excuse me—to choose a more suitable courier," he said.

" In what way are you unsuitable, Captain Behrens ? "

" General—you appealed to my personal honour. That is what makes me beg of you to choose another courier."

" Your personal honour overrides your duty ? I do not understand you, Captain Behrens."

" I cannot explain, General ; you must forgive me . . . A private circumstance . . . I can say no more."

" So ! " von Blancke spoke sternly. " Then you would disobey an order ? "

Behrens paused awhile.

" No, General. If it is an order—and nothing else —I shall do my duty to—my country."

" I shall not give that order, Captain Behrens."

The General stretched out a hand, took the wallet from the escritoire, where it had rested, and stuffed it into the pocket of his dressing-gown. Then, raising and dropping his broad shoulders, he did an extraordinary thing.

Beckoning Behrens to come near the bookshelves, he pointed to an array of volumes in uniform binding upon a middle shelf. " German as I am in every fibre of my being," he said deliberately, " I am in agreement with that author's teaching. He is no *jingo*, as the English call it. Imperialist, yes—undoubtedly, and rightly so. But he is first of all the apostle of personal honour, which he maintains to be, and I am in complete agreement with him, the true foundation of a nation's greatness. That author sees the State built up on the individual—or sooner or later it must fall. We Germans have always moulded the individual—nay, fused him into the requirements of a cast-iron State.

To a vast extent, in that difference lay the inevitability of this war of nations. . . . Well, Captain Behrens ? "

Captain Behrens ! . . . Captain *Behrens* ? . . . Captain Fool ! . . .

The author upon the shelf was no other than Rudyard Kipling. General von Blancke *knew* that I was English—though to this day I haven't the ghost of a notion how he knew, or when he realised the fatal truth. With the rattle of musketry already in my ears, once again sheer funk laid hold of me and I couldn't utter a sound.

I stood staring at that blue leather edition of Kipling on a German bookshelf, until I became aware that General von Blancke had dropped into his chair again, with his elbows upon the escritoire and his chin between his great palms, the gnarled fingers spread out upon his cheeks and ears.

I waited, moments, hours—I cannot say for how long. He might have been asleep—or carven in granite ; and when at last he spoke it might have been an image speaking—with a voice, too, hard as granite and totally without expression. I did not see his face,

" Captain Behrens," said he, " I have to thank you for the motives which brought you to me. My car and chauffeur are at your disposal, if you wish. I want no thanks. You are dismissed."

Well, I like to hug my convictions. I like to think

that I played to the gallery on that occasion; to a gallery with one occupant—myself. But still more, I like to think of General von Blancke as a sportsman and a gentleman in the only way that matters. Yes, a German gentleman who, on a nice point of honour, granted one of the enemy his life.

THE END

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